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28th plenary meeting
Thursday, 6 October 2005, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Eliasson ..... (Sweden)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 62 (*continued*)

Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

Two plenary meetings devoted to the evaluation of the progress made in the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/60/61, A/60/133 and Corr.1, and A/60/156)

Draft resolution (A/60/L.2)

Ms. Mouro (Portugal) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the Portuguese Government, I have been designated to represent Portuguese youth during this special meeting of the General Assembly devoted to youth.

I wish to associate myself with the statement made by the youth representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union.

In recent years much work has been done to reaffirm youth policies, particularly as concerns the objectives set out in the World Programme of Action for Youth, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As citizens of the world, we want to express our ideas and feelings and to create the necessary conditions for the participation of young people in society.

We believe that we need more than just recognition. Young people represent an important social group and should enjoy the right to participate and state their views on all aspects of society relevant to them. It is not enough to have a youth policy. Young people must to be involved in the formulation and implementation of the policies that affect them, including through credible, accountable, autonomous and independent youth organizations.

The promotion of the protection of, and respect for, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all young people form the basis of our national youth policy. It is of utmost importance that human rights be implemented and safeguarded in order to improve young people's lives as well as ensure their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

With regard to the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth, the Portuguese Government, together with the National Youth Council, has developed developing a series of activities and projects aimed at the Programme's implementation. We held a seminar on "Young people and sexuality", whose conclusions reiterated the importance and urgency of campaigns to inform young people about sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, as well as unplanned pregnancy.

We have recently relaunched our "Different but equal" campaign, which addresses the problems of

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xenophobia, racism and cultural and gender discrimination.

Sustainable development is also a key issue for us. We have published a book on the topic that has been distributed in schools throughout the country and has been made available to all youth institutions. That book will serve as a tool to raise the awareness of, and sensitize Portuguese youth to, that issue.

The Portuguese youth policy takes a cross-sectoral approach and encompasses important areas affecting young peoples' lives. In recent years, the Portuguese Government, in close cooperation with the National Youth Council, supported the holding of significant international youth meetings, particularly the World Youth Festival; the first World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, which issued the Lisbon Declaration; the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries Youth Conference; and the most recent consultative meeting on the 10-year review of the World Programme of Action for Youth, held at Coimbra last January, which issued a number of recommendations on the Programme of Action.

During the Coimbra meeting, we had the opportunity, for the first time, to engage in a genuine exchange of views between United Nations agencies and youth organizations on the implementation of the Programme.

At the international level, our National Youth Council has been cooperating with the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries on two objectives. The first relates to the mobility of young Portuguese speakers, and the second is a project aimed at informing, warning and educating young people about HIV/AIDS.

We have done a great deal over the past 10 years to promote and implement the World Programme of Action, but much more must be done. We will continue to do our share to achieve the goals that are our common responsibility.

The participation of young people in decision-making processes is one of the key priority areas of the United Nations agenda on youth. We therefore urge national Governments to continue to include youth representatives in their national delegations to important international events, including sessions of the General Assembly and of the Commission for Social Development.

Youth representatives can take home to their respective countries knowledge that can then be transmitted to other young people, thereby creating an opportunity to motivate increasing numbers of young people to become involved in the shaping of their future.

Youth representatives can also make significant inputs to discussions held in the context of various institutions. We will continue our work and remain committed to working with international institutions. We are cooperating with, among others, the European Youth Forum.

We reaffirm the commitments we have undertaken in the context of the World Programme of Action for Youth and its five priorities. We remain committed to the Millennium Development Goals, and we ask the United Nations to assist Member States and youth organizations in the implementation of a comprehensive, cross-sectoral youth policy capable of reaching young people everywhere.

Young people must be considered part of the solution, and not a problem.

The President: Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I should like to inform members that there are a large number of speakers on our list for this meeting. In order to accommodate all the speakers, and taking into account that we must allow time for the consideration of draft resolution A/60/L.2, and for the exercise of the right of reply, I strongly urge speakers to limit their statements to four minutes.

Ms. Taracena Secaira (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like at the outset to reiterate what was expressed by the representative of Argentina on behalf of the Rio Group, who explained the situation of young people in the region. To evaluate the situation of the world's young people is to evaluate the future of the world. It is to analyse where we are and where we want to go, because today's young people represent the future of humanity and of the world.

If, as stated in the report of the Secretary-General (*A/60/61*), young people represent 18 per cent of the world's population and 85 per cent of them live in developing countries, the future is in our hands. That is a great responsibility not only for our own countries, but for everyone. It is a challenge that is not only national, but global.

Guatemala has understood that very well. That is why, two years ago, we launched the national youth policy, aimed at the comprehensive and sustainable development of the Guatemalan young people participating in it. Although young people represent 70 per cent of my country's current population, they did not have access to comprehensive strategies or programmes until now.

This is the first national youth policy that has been established in Guatemala. We are proud to have developed it with broad participation by representatives of my country's diverse ethnic and linguistic groups and with the assistance of an interagency coordination effort. Participating in its creation were 10 ministries; three State secretariats; the Supreme Court of Justice; 48 youth representatives of the linguistic communities of the Mayan, Garifuna and Xinca peoples, as proposed by the Mayan Language Academy of Guatemala; the Council of the Xinca People and the Organization of Black Guatemalans; 12 youth representatives of the political parties; and 311 civil society organizations active in areas pertaining to youth — all of them under the coordination of the National Youth Council of Guatemala.

Through the policy, we seek to implement the principles of solidarity and inclusion of President Oscar Berger Perdomo's governmental plan for 2004-2008 — whose agenda accords priority to young people and to the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond — and to assist in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. We are aware that we can achieve the Goals only if all sectors of society are involved.

The policy's purpose is to direct the efforts of the State towards improving young people's quality of life, promoting their comprehensive development and broadening their opportunities to build unity in diversity and to become good citizens. We need young people to take responsibility for facilitating and making the transition from lacking access to opportunities to fully exercising their rights and citizenship.

The national youth policy is based on four principles: the principle of human rights, in which young people are seen as having individual and collective civil, political, cultural, economic and social rights; the principle of multiculturalism, which recognizes the diversity of the peoples and cultures that together form one nation and that build unity out of diversity, knowledge, understanding and mutual respect among the various cultures and civilizations that are a basic characteristic of my country; the principle of sustainability, which sets out basic guidelines for sustainable development, as they relate to economic organization, the relationship with the natural environment, social and political organization and cultural aspects; and the principle of intergenerational cooperation, which fosters relations of solidarity, cooperation and mutual respect among various age groups, recognizing that each group has important values to share with and teach to other generations.

The national youth policy focuses on six areas: gender, the life cycle, comprehensiveness and inclusion, the family, the multisectoral approach and territoriality. It also has 11 components, including citizen participation, multiculturalism, community security and justice, scientific and technological education and development, integral and differentiated health care, employment and work, and starting a business and competitiveness.

We are pleased that the draft resolution on which we will take a decision at this meeting will emphasize the importance of employment and work. Our young people need decent work that will remove them from the risks and dangers of idleness, which include frustration, vagrancy, drug abuse, HIV/AIDS infection, gang membership, violence and delinquency.

I cannot fail to emphasize that during the process of elaborating Guatemala's national youth policy, a gender perspective was incorporated as a norm for participation, requiring equal numbers of women and men from all participating organizations. Guatemalan young people thus provided us with a valuable lesson that should be taken into account by the rest of society. Nor can I fail to mention the national and international cooperative entities that took part in this process, including the Guatemalan Indigenous Development Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF, the German Agency for Technical Cooperation and the Iberoamerican Youth Organization. Many thanks go to all of them.

Finally, I must tell the Assembly how much I regret having been the one to make this statement in this Hall, because my Government would have preferred that a representative of Guatemalan youth

could have come. But the problem was a lack of resources, not a lack of willingness. That is why we support the initiative to create a United Nations youth fund that would facilitate economic assistance for youth representatives of developing countries and give them the opportunity to participate in all United Nations forums directly concerning them. However, I am very proud to have been able to share with members what young people are doing in Guatemala.

The President: I note the representative's plea for facilities to make it possible for young people to attend functions of this nature.

Mr. Chaimongkol (Thailand): At the outset, my delegation would like to extend a very warm welcome to all the youth representatives, whose young faces remind us of the very purpose of our gathering here today. In fact, the General Assembly can benefit greatly by listening to them, as our young partners in working for the future.

The world we live in today is very different from that of 1995 when the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond was adopted. Therefore, it is timely for us all to take stock of that instrument's implementation during the past decade and to assess its actual impact on the lives of young persons, who make up approximately one fifth of the world's population. The occasion also provides us with an opportunity to highlight new challenges that many young people around the world are facing — often in silence or with their voices unheard.

My delegation welcomes the Secretary-General's World Youth Report 2005 (*A/60/61*), and his report on the global analysis and evaluation of national action plans on youth employment (*A/60/133*). Both of those reports are comprehensive and can serve as suitable starting points for further discussions on the situation of youth today. In addition, my delegation welcomes the Secretary-General's report, "Making commitments matter: young people's input to the 10-year review of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond" (*A/60/156*), as well as the informal interactive round table organized on that theme — "Young People: Making Commitments Matter" — held on 5 October, both of which provide us with useful youth perspectives on various issues of direct concern to young people themselves.

Although it is evident that progress on youth development has been made on many fronts, many challenges still remain. On the economic front, it was reported that 515 million young people — or nearly 45 per cent of youth worldwide — live on less than $2 a day, with almost half of that population living on less than $1 a day. While it is acknowledged that education is one of the keys to alleviating poverty, it must also be emphasized that poverty is a major obstacle to education. A young person whose basic needs for food, clothing and shelter are not met cannot reasonably be expected to attend school or pursue education. In many poverty-stricken families young persons are taken out of school to help support their families. Therefore, it is necessary to effectively tackle poverty at the same time that we enhance access to all levels of education. By the same token, I do strongly believe that education will open up opportunities for all.

Mr. Kyaw Tint Swe (Myanmar), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Youth employment can serve as a tool for development. However, young persons in many parts of the world still face unemployment and underemployment. That fact inevitably hinders the development process and increases the vulnerability of youth to other kinds of social and political problems, including drug addiction and trafficking, human smuggling and trafficking, and recruitment into armed conflicts. For that reason, youth need to be empowered so that they can obtain knowledge and skills that meet the employment needs of the marketplace. At the same time, it is incumbent upon Governments to create decent employment opportunities for young persons. In that respect, my delegation welcomes the inclusion of the issue of youth employment in the World Summit Outcome. We owe it to all young persons to put the commitments our leaders have collectively undertaken into practice.

In 2002, Thailand adopted a national policy and 10-year plan of action on children and youth to promote the role of the family in supporting and building the capacity of young persons. In addition, various organizations that promote youth development have been supported and encouraged to coordinate their activities. Most importantly, the national policy and plan of action aim to empower young persons themselves with the relevant skills and knowledge so that they can make informed choices and decisions on matters relating to their own lives, as well as to society as a whole.

Youth is a critical period in life. It is when we make that important transition from childhood into adulthood. Young persons are full of aspirations, energy, and potential. They can contribute to all aspects of society's development. It is therefore crucial that we do not squander this opportunity to invest in the future. We must ensure that the basic needs and rights of the world's youth are guaranteed, so that they may attain their aspirations, fully utilize their energy, and fulfil their potential. The ways and means may vary according to the situations of each society, but our objective must be the same: to empower our youth, so that they may contribute to creating a more peaceful, prosperous and democratic world.

Ms. Meena (United Republic of Tanzania): I am honoured to read a statement on behalf of the young people of the United Republic of Tanzania, and I am grateful that the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania for giving us this opportunity to be heard. We also thank the United Nations for giving youth delegates the opportunity to participate and request all Governments to continue to send youth delegates to future United Nations meetings.

Youth constitute almost a third of the total population of the United Republic of Tanzania, and comprise 65 per cent of the labour force. We are thus a force to be reckoned with: we need to be heard in all decision-making processes, and to have youth issues mainstreamed into national development policies, strategies and programmes.

The Government of Tanzania has taken several measures to improve the situation of youth. However, many challenges still remain. Our country is still poor. It is confronted both with a heavy debt burden and a difficult struggle against diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria that affect a large segment of the youth population. Assisting the capacity of the Government to implement the Millennium Development Goals and the World Programme of Action on Youth is, in the end, to support our youth.

The majority of my fellow young people live in rural areas. Addressing the inequities and imbalances in development opportunities between rural and urban areas has to be given priority in order to curb the problem of rural-to-urban immigration. In view of a growing trend in this area, we are observing rapid growth in the urban informal sector and an increase in the incidence of hazardous employment and crime. Productive and decent work for young people has to be addressed as a strategy in poverty reduction and sustainable development. There is thus also a need to foster day-to-day growth of the informal sector through entrepreneurship development, infrastructure development and provision of capital.

We agree with the observation that globalization creates both opportunities and challenges. We need to be able to enhance our effective participation as well as increase our capacities to take advantage of opportunities in the national and global economies. If the quality of education in our countries is not improved and the digital divide not bridged, youth in the developing countries will continue to be spectators and will remain excluded from the economy.

As young people, we recognize that we too have responsibilities to be good citizens, to respect the rule of law in our societies and to contribute to the welfare of our communities. It is important for us to be organized and strive to participate fully in the social, economic, cultural and political life of our nations. To do so, we need mentoring and support.

I wish to conclude by stating that political will and commitment at the highest level nationally and internationally are of primary importance in creating an enabling environment for youth empowerment. We urge our societies and Governments to consider us as assets, not as problems. Please give us space and opportunities.

Mr. Kitaoka (Japan): Ten years after the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, there have been significant developments in the priority areas of the Programme. However, the current generation of young people is facing even more complicated challenges than those envisaged 10 years ago.

Japanese society has been undergoing a rapid transformation from its traditionally homogeneous nature to one that is more individualistic, due partly to the globalization of the economy, as well as to the advent of information technology, which has resulted in increased use of the Internet and of cellular phones.

In addition, a changing demographic structure has created more single-person households and one-child families as a result of our lower birth rate and ageing population. In order to promote sound development for the young people who will lead the nation and

contribute to international society in the twenty-first century, it is important to appropriately take into account today's social environment and take drastic action to that end as we formulate national youth development policy.

While Japan has the good fortune of having a high educational level, a side effect of this has been that we have fallen slightly behind in our commitment to a national youth development policy. In June 2003, however, a headquarters for youth development was set up within a cabinet office. In December 2003 — six months later — a national youth development policy, which articulates both basic principles and long-term Government policies, was adopted.

Taking the World Programme of Action fully into consideration, Japan also has been adopting measures for the development of youth in order to foster such human qualities as independence, responsibility, solidarity and tolerance, and to promote awareness of human rights and the notion of living in a global society.

While actively committing itself to the formulation and implementation of a national youth policy, Japan is also firmly engaged in international cooperation and supports youth in developing countries by providing development assistance, as well as by engaging in international exchanges and volunteer activities. For example, Japan has vigorously provided assistance in the field of education by building educational institutions, accepting teachers for training and dispatching experts, as well as by providing educational materials and classroom equipment.

In conclusion, the delegation of Japan strongly hopes that the review we are conducting at this meeting will contribute further to addressing the challenges facing youth and renewing the determination of every Member State to attain the goals of the World Programme of Action for Youth. At this tenth anniversary of the World Programme of Action, I would like to quote from the address of the Secretary-General to the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth in 1998:

> "... no one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline".

Mr. Ali (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation wishes to express its pleasure at participating in the work of this special session of the General Assembly, convened on the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. The convening of this session to review the efforts made and the progress achieved as regards the World Program of Action for Youth is clear evidence and a great affirmation of the growing concern paid by the international Organization and its Members to young people and of the space it sets aside in its programmes and plans for their concerns and various issues. Such importance was made necessary by the focus of attention being attracted by this segment of society, the young people who are pioneers in building nations and achieving renaissance, development and prosperity. This special session is to consider a renewal of the pledge to the youth that their agenda, their aspirations and the challenges they face will remain at the forefront of the priorities, programmes and concerns of the United Nations.

Allow me here to pay tribute to the contents of the report of the Secretary-General, which adopted an integrated, comprehensive approach to the concerns of youth and the challenges facing them. The report also monitored the efforts made nationally and internationally with a view to achieving such objectives. The five new concerns indicated supplement the priorities of the World Programme of Action so as to keep up with new developments and changes in the world arena. We welcome these five concerns; they are of great interest to us.

In this context, we also welcome the resolution submitted this morning, and we affirm our full readiness to tackle such concerns through youth programmes, plans and policies, with resolve, will and sheer determination.

Our appreciation also goes to the Secretariat units working in this field for their efforts and solid preparation that culminated in holding this important meeting and the activities leading up to it.

The concerns, issues and aspirations of Sudanese youth occupy a high priority in our Government's plans and programmes as an expression of our firm belief in the vital role of youth in progress and construction. Here, we would like to refer briefly to increasing efforts to adopt the concerns and issues of youth, foremost of which are the major achievements

resulting from the higher education revolution. That "revolution" increased the annual enrolment in universities from 12,000 in 1995 to 25,000 in the year 2000. This year, the number of male and female students who were accepted in the various higher education institutions has exceeded 40,000. Various universities and institutions of higher learning have experienced a major breakthrough with the number of universities increasing from only five in 1995 to more than 40 in 2005.

In the context of combating unemployment, training youth in various crafts and professions and providing opportunities and means of production, the State has adopted a major project upon the initiative of and in coordination with the Union for National Youth, one of the largest youth organizations in the Sudan. This project, entitled "Choosing the means of livelihood", is being undertaken under the generous auspices of His Excellency the President; and its implementation has reached an advance stage.

There are efforts to eradicate technological illiteracy by creating information centres and providing computers and creating youth and sports clubs. Youth have undertaken pioneer projects to defeat malaria and to create awareness of the adverse effects of drugs. They have also set up environmental and conservation programmes.

The signing of the Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement put an end to the war in the South and threw the doors wide open to a promising future of good tidings and hope for all Sudanese people. This brings hope for development, stability and prosperity. As is their wont, youth have been at the forefront in implementing programmes for the culture of peace and confidence-building and strengthening and in leading reconstruction and restoring normalcy.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to convey to this World Youth Meeting the greetings and appreciation of Sudanese youth and their aspirations for a productive partnership with all youth around the world in order to promote the peace efforts in the Sudan through reconstruction, the promise of peace, development, prosperity and well-being.

Mr. Gill (India): At the outset, please allow me to express our deep appreciation to the President of the General Assembly for his introductory remarks. I would also like to thank him for providing us this opportunity to review the progress made at the plenary level in implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

My delegation wishes to take this opportunity to reaffirm its support for the initiatives taken by the United Nations for all-round development of youth so that they become key agents for social change, economic development and technological innovation.

India is an ancient civilization but a young society. Nearly 56 per cent of the population is below the age of 24. India has been cognizant of the significant role of youth in national reconstruction and social change. Accordingly, national youth policies have been developed for composite and all-round development to enable them to develop a wider national perspective and to keep them strong in heart, body and mind. The thrust of our national youth policy centres on youth empowerment in different spheres of national life. The youth development programmes devised in India over the years have focussed on personality development, qualities of citizenship, enhanced commitment to community service, social justice, self-reliance, national integration and humanism.

The Prime Minister of India, Mr. Manmohan Singh, has referred to youth as the building blocks of our nation. He has drawn attention to the fact that the attitudes and outlook of youth on life and society play a determining role in shaping our destiny and our future.

Recognizing the importance of providing opportunities to the youth in particular, the Government of India has oriented its employment guarantee programmes to accommodate and provide for the aspirations of the growing numbers of young people that access the job market every year. There is a special emphasis on those who are disadvantaged, such as poor and rural youth. The National Rural Employment Act, passed by the Indian Parliament in August this year, for the first time makes the right to work a fundamental right. The Rural Employment Guarantee scheme, thus created, provides 100 days of assured employment every year to every rural household. The training of rural youth for self-employment scheme is designed to specifically train rural youth in skills to enable them to take up self-employment. The scheme stipulates that at least 40 per cent of the beneficiaries should be women and 50 per cent from socially backward groups.

Elementary education is now a fundamental right in India. The Government has resolved to increase public spending in education to at least six per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP). At least half of this amount would be spent in the development of primary and secondary education. To pursue universal elementary education on a priority basis, Sarva Shiksha Abhiya, India's universal elementary education scheme, was launched in 1998, covering the entire country. Education above the secondary level has a significant vocational training component so as to enable youth to acquire skills that would augment avenues for employment. Nehru Yuva Kendras, national youth clubs, have spearheaded the youth movement in the country.

The health needs of the youth are at the core of development of the health infrastructure in India. A holistic approach has been adopted, encompassing general, mental, physical and spiritual health of the young. Among the priority areas, HIV/AIDS is no longer treated as just a health issue, but as a most serious socio-economic development issue. Government spending on health has been increased, and it will be raised to two to three per cent of GDP over the next year.

My delegation would like to propose a special focus on youth employment in the work of the United Nations. In that regard, we welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General to promote the Youth Employment Network and look forward to working with other delegations to ensure that the Network can be developed in the coming months.

The challenges ahead of us for the all-round development of youth are daunting. But to be sure, with effective national and international efforts, they can be overcome. Issues related to youth should be seen in the context of social and economic development in the age of the information revolution and globalization.

The Secretary-General's report provides an incisive analysis on five new concerns related to youth: globalization, information and communication technology, HIV/AIDS and young people, youth and armed conflict and intergenerational problems. My delegation will work with other delegations for the inclusion of those concerns in the World Programme of Action for Youth.

Mr. Puja (Indonesia): My delegation is grateful for the comprehensive reports of the Secretary-General pertaining to progress in implementing the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (*A/60/61, A/60/133, A/60/156*). Our meeting is an opportune moment to review what has been accomplished and the obstacles encountered in implementing the World Programme since it was adopted 10 years ago.

My delegation notes significant progress made in a number of priority areas of the Programme of Action. However, progress has been uneven in those areas, including at the country level, which should be cause for concern. Further, Indonesia has noted that a number of complex challenges affecting youth have emerged since the inception of the Programme of Action in 1995.

In line with the priority areas of the Programme of Action, the Indonesian Government, under the leadership of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, is using a triple-track strategy of pro-growth, pro-employment and pro-poor measures that strongly reflect a people-centred development approach. That strategy includes measures to achieve greater sustainable economic growth through a combination of strong exports and increased domestic and foreign investment; stimulate the performance of employment-generating sectors; and promote the development of the rural economy and agriculture to alleviate poverty.

With that strategy, we aim, by 2009, to reduce the unemployment rate from 9.5 per cent to 5.1 per cent and to cut the poverty rate by half, to 8.1 percent. We also seek to attain a 6.6 per cent annual growth rate for the next five years, to be achieved through macroeconomic stability, fiscal sustainability and financial sector reforms. Additional resources will be allocated for social sector programmes and infrastructure development.

An integral part of the triple-track strategy is our pro-employment policy, which plays a significant role in the well-being of youth in Indonesia. As a lead country in the Secretary-General's initiative of the Youth Employment Network, Indonesia, in cooperation with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, convened a regional workshop on youth in poverty in South-East Asia from 2 to 4 August 2004 in Yogyakarta, involving participants at the Government and expert levels from Cambodia,

Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines and Viet Nam. The workshop resulted in a number of significant inputs for the preparation of a review and action plans on youth employment, which is under our consideration at the present session.

With the support of the International Labour Organization, Indonesia has adopted its youth employment action plan for 2004-2007, which rests on four pillars: providing quality basic education to prepare youth for work, creating quality jobs for young men and women through formal sector job creation, fostering entrepreneurship and ensuring equal opportunities for young men and women.

In implementing that action plan, the Government of Indonesia has been working closely with local government to build a solid foundation to speed efforts to address youth employment. The Government of Indonesia started the programme by conducting various awareness-raising campaigns.

Since its launch last year, progress on the implementation of the action plan has not slackened. For example, Indonesia's awareness-raising campaigns have focused on changing traditional perceptions of gender roles and the division of responsibilities between women and men. That is being addressed through the revision of national curricula and national education in general.

Other initiatives exploring opportunities in emerging sectors such as tourism, mass media, health and education, environmental conservation, the service sector and information and communication technology are also being implemented. Indonesia fully recognizes that information and communication technology represents a key driving force for growth and job creation in other sectors. Meanwhile, the agro-industry sector is being improved in order to strengthen urban-rural linkages, which are critical for job creation, poverty reduction and combating hunger.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm Indonesia's commitment to the World Programme of Action for Youth. While Indonesia appreciates the ongoing support and cooperation provided by the relevant United Nations agencies, it looks forward to their further support for the five new areas of concern pertaining to youth.

Ms. Garant (Canada) (*spoke in French*): Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the youth of Canada. It is a great honour for me and my delegation to be here today to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. But it is much more than a celebration. It is also a time to reflect on what has been done, what is being done and what should be done for young people around the world. How the global community responds to those challenges will determine how well its young citizens will be able to fulfil their potential.

Canada recognizes the need to invest in its youth. Such investments have contributed to Canada's diversity, as well as to one of the highest standards of living in the world.

As my youth colleague Mathew Whynott likes to say, the young people of this world are the future, but we also have to remember that they are the present. Canada therefore views the policies and programmes we initiate for youth today as a means to help us with the demographic challenges of tomorrow. With an ageing workforce, we must maximize the participation and well-being of all Canadians.

In 2003, there were more than 4 million Canadians between the ages of 15 and 24, representing 14 per cent of our total population. Approximately 4 per cent of those youth are aboriginal or indigenous, and they often live in rural and isolated areas and face serious socio-economic challenges, especially related to the lack of education and skills. Immigrants and members of visible minority communities, who make up 28 per cent of Canadian youth, tend to live in major urban centres and face linguistic and cultural challenges. While half of our youth are in post-secondary education, many without advanced education will face problems when entering a workforce where almost all jobs are now highly skilled. Those issues are of major concern for Canada as it faces the impending retirement of its baby boomers and feels the increasing impacts of globalization.

Literacy is a crucial concern. Consider only one statistic: those with the lowest literacy have an unemployment rate of 26 per cent as compared with 4 per cent for those with the highest. Recent immigrants now take seven or eight years to catch up to the literacy levels of Canadians in their same age group. As a result, they may face long-term incomes up to 20 per cent less than those born in Canada. A recent

report by Statistics Canada has revealed that a mere 1 per cent increase in the average literacy rate in Canada will lead to an increase of $18.4 billion in the gross domestic product. It will drive prosperity, cultural inclusion, and social advancement.

Economic growth is another outcome of prioritizing education. With literacy and proper skills training, a young person can go on to obtain a secure job that will contribute to the economic advancement of his or her community.

(*spoke in English*)

The Youth Employment Strategy is the Government of Canada's commitment to helping young people, particularly those facing barriers to employment. That strategy was initially introduced in 1997 to address some of the challenges faced by youth in making a successful transition from school to work. In 2003 it was realigned to focus on the value and need for skills, work experience and information to make sure that youth were ready to compete in the labour market of the twenty-first century, including through the acquisition of further education and skills development.

The Government of Canada is actively involved in engaging youth through consultations. For example, youth were consulted on a Government online initiative that resulted in the "youth.gc.ca" website, designed specifically for young Canadians. I happen to be living proof of how the Government of Canada partners with its youth: I was chosen as a United Nations delegate for this week's meetings through an online essay writing competition. There is a strong support for young Canadians to take an active role in policymaking through online and in-person consultations and that support continues to grow.

As we move into the future and as globalization progresses, Canada recognizes the international challenge of addressing the welfare of youth. And while we address youth issues nationally, international links must not be ignored. The Canadian International Development Agency supports an array of initiatives to ensure equitable, inclusive and sustainable development, as well as pragmatic improvements in the lives of people around the world, including youth. The Agency engages Canadians abroad in missions that work to meet the goals of the World Programme of Action for Youth in the area of education. Canadian international efforts focus on four main areas. The first is improving the quality, safety and relevance of basic education, so that student enrolment and motivation remain high. The second area of focus is removing barriers to resolve gender inequality in education and strengthening the programming in girls' education. Another focus is providing education on HIV/AIDS prevention and supporting the better integration of such programmes in the curricula. The fourth element provides education for girls and boys in conflict, post-conflict or emergency situations to introduce stability and protection in emergency settings. That work allows Canada to contribute to the efforts of countries around the world.

Clearly, much needs to be done to ensure the well-being of the world's youth. We will continue to work towards improving the outcomes for youth in Canada and around the world. We ask for the recognition and involvement of youth; we ask for tolerance and understanding; and we ask for implementation. It is time for action. We all know what to do. Now, please let us do it.

Mr. Lim (Singapore): It gives me great pleasure to participate in this meeting of the General Assembly devoted to a discussion of youth issues, and particularly to an evaluation of progress made in implementing the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

In the concluding recommendations of his World Youth Report 2005, the Secretary-General stated that young people should be seen as essential partners for building a society of the future. He affirmed that Governments should continuously evaluate their youth policies and involve young people in that evaluation, and that including youth in policymaking would increase the commitment of young people to the policies that affect them and create greater opportunities for cooperation and true youth participation.

Those statements are consonant with Singapore's own recent policies to better engage our youth in shaping our country's future. Indeed, at his swearing-in address on 12 August 2004, our Prime Minister made a similar call to young Singaporeans to step forward to make a difference to themselves, to their fellow citizens and to Singapore.

Youth forms the basis of a country's future; their aspirations and endeavours will provide the momentum to propel countries forward.

To better engage our youth, our Ministry of Community Development and Sports underwent a structural and name change in 2004 to become the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports. Singapore also adopted a youth strategy based on the three elements. First, we must assist youth to develop a stake in society by creating opportunities for them to positively influence their environment. Secondly, we should ensure that youth have a say in national affairs by involving them in the process of consultation. Thirdly, we need to provide youth with the support they need to develop and participate meaningfully in society, through facilitation, mentorship and other assistance mechanisms.

The Singapore Government initiated an intensive six-week youth consultation exercise from August to September 2004. More than 2,000 young Singaporeans from both Singapore and overseas were invited to share their aspirations for themselves and for Singapore, and to help shape the Government's new agenda for youth. They spoke passionately about their beliefs and shared their ideas readily. More than 100 young participants later volunteered to follow up on the suggestions raised during the consultation exercise. They formed working groups, proposed a further 91 recommendations and championed issues that had emerged as key concerns during the consultations.

The working group process enabled the Singapore Government to take one step further, moving beyond public consultation to collaborative action. Our young people assumed leadership over the process and over some of the ideas that are now being implemented. Those include a festival, "Shine", organized by young people for young people, that celebrates the talents of our youth; an Internet portal, "youth.sg", as a first-stop virtual meeting place and resource centre for youth to start their own community projects; a 1.2 hectare youth community hub designed, developed and operated by youth in the heart of the city for youth cultural and community activities; and a "young changemakers" programme for young Singaporeans to assess and award seed grants to community projects proposed by their peers.

It is also important for our youth to understand and appreciate the realities of the world beyond their immediate communities. In that regard, the Singapore Government has also undertaken efforts to initiate regional and international youth exchanges to connect Singapore's youth to the world and to prepare them to be world-ready. Through such strategic linkups, youth leaders of participating youth organizations have the opportunity to share best practices in areas of youth sector development with their peers overseas. It is that type of informal and intuitive mutual understanding that will pave the way for closer ties between young people across countries.

Youth is a key resource for society. If we build on the potential of our youth, communities will develop and grow stronger. The future awaits us, and it lies in the hands of our young people.

Mr. Abel (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like at the outset to acknowledge the young people of Brazil and my colleagues from the National Youth Secretariat, who are joining in our work via the Internet.

Ten years have passed since the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. We all have a great deal to celebrate, but there is still a long way to go before we can guarantee future generations the right to enjoy a better world — a world of real opportunity, justice and solidarity.

Brazil has 34 million young people, making up 20 per cent of the population. It is the young people who suffer most from the harsh reality of social inequality in our country and throughout the world. Efforts in the context of the World Programme of Action for Youth have come together with actions taken by the Government and the people of Brazil to set out integrated policies to improve the living conditions of our young people.

Brazil declared 2005 to be the National Year for Youth, and I would like to outline some of the actions that have been taken for the benefit of young people. In February, the Government of Brazil established the National Youth Secretariat, under the auspices of the general secretariat of the presidency of the Republic. We also established a general counsel for youth — a special forum for intergenerational dialogue and the elaboration of policies aimed at young people. Furthermore, a national programme for young people, entitled "Projovem", has been launched, with a budget of more than $100 million. The goal of that programme is to make up the significant educational deficit in our country, as well as to prepare young people for the labour market. By the end of 2005, more than 200,000 young people will have benefited from that

programme. We are convinced that that initiative, as well as our First Job Programme, will soon bear fruit.

Brazil had the privilege of hosting the Latin American and Caribbean Youth Leadership Summit, organized by the United Nations Development Fund, which brought together young leaders from the region to discuss the Millennium Development Goals from a youth perspective.

Thanks to our national HIV/AIDS policy, which addresses prevention, assistance and treatment and guarantees universal access to antiretroviral medication, without discrimination and with respect for human rights, the rate of infection in the general population is very low. Furthermore, our schools health and prevention programme provides information on HIV to all students and distributes condoms free of charge.

With regard to girls and young women, policy priorities focus on gender-related violence and the promotion of sexual and reproductive health. To that end, action is being coordinated among various Government agencies and civil society.

The Brazilian Government is firmly committed to combating hunger and poverty. In that context, Brazil reaffirms the commitment that it made in 2004 as one of the leading countries of the Youth Employment Network. We commend the Secretary-General for his initiative aimed at enabling young people to get a foothold in the labour market, thereby contributing to the reduction of social inequalities.

Brazil is carrying out activities in all areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth. The dialogue between the Government and civil society is extremely important in that process. We are convinced that public policies for youth are among the most important means of achieving comprehensive development, not only in our country, but also throughout the world.

Mr. Bhattarai (Nepal): We are meeting here today to evaluate the progress made in the implementation of the 15 priority areas in the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

Five years ago, our leaders promised the people of the United Nations that they would improve their quality of life through the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The establishment of the United Nations Youth Fund and the launching of the Youth Employment Network encouraged the promotion of national action plans for youth employment.

The outcome document contains commitments to the goals of full and productive employment and decent work for all, including for women and young people. Those documents provide a road map for social and economic development — an explicit commitment to tackle inequalities in income, opportunity and power, to promote social integration and to address the issue of the social protection and welfare of children, youth, the elderly and disabled persons.

Young people represent the future. Youth is a time both of opportunity and of challenge. Thanks to several development forums, the case for investing in young people has been made clearer, and today youth has come to occupy the centre stage of international development. An investment in youth is an investment in the future. In order to harness the potential of youth, and thereby enrich society, we must give young people — particularly those from marginalized and disadvantaged communities — a say and a share at the grass-roots level in the development process, ensuring that they play a full role in shaping a bright and secure future for all of us. A committed and aware young person is an asset to the community and the country.

The fact that some countries are poor while others are prosperous poses a great threat to international peace and security. Poverty is a curse and a scar for any society. People living in poverty are vulnerable and voiceless. Traffickers and terrorists recruit them by offering tempting rewards. People without income or security fall prey to crime and violence, and often get trapped in protracted conflict. The economic and social costs become pervasive.

We must address the severe inequalities and inequities, and put in place programmes to provide employment opportunities and ensure institutional and policy development, as well as civil society initiatives for the education and health of children. Youth empowerment is necessary in order to combat the vulnerability of young people to the influence of fundamentalism, radicalism, insurgency and terrorism.

Nepal has been the victim of senseless violence perpetrated by terrorists, which has taken a great toll in terms of lives, and has had an adverse impact on young people and prevented them from engaging in constructive processes. Nepal's current development

plan includes a policy reform package, which addresses, among other issues, social inclusion, empowerment, gender mainstreaming, education and health for all, income-generating activities, the prohibition of socio-cultural discriminatory practices, targeted and time-bound development programmes and participatory governance. Our utmost priority at the moment is to restore peace and order, put development efforts back on track and provide opportunities for all to realize their potential. Nepal looks forward to working with the international community to engage young people, develop their capacity, tap their knowledge and skills and promote and support their participation in economic and social life through an integrated package of measures.

In this increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, creating a sustained global partnership with young people is a must for any programme to succeed. Development policies should therefore be supportive of growth, poverty reduction and the creation of decent work for all.

For this to happen, there must be urgent action on various international commitments and sustained global partnership for providing resources, trade opportunities and debt relief measures to least developed countries, taking into account their special needs and vulnerability. It is equally important to have the multidimensional strategy to fight the closely linked problems of poverty and terrorism at the national, regional and global levels without any selective standards.

Let us join hands to channel the power of youth into a precious resource for development.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): My delegation welcomes the convening of this plenary meeting of the General Assembly devoted to the evaluation of the progress made in the implementation of the World Programme for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

The round table held yesterday as a forum for the expression and exchange of youth perspectives was a meaningful and useful event. We were pleased to see a young delegate from Viet Nam participating in yesterday's round table as a presenter for the Asia-Pacific region.

Of the 80 million people of Viet Nam, 16 million are young people between the ages of 15 and 24; that is nearly 20 per cent of the country's population. Viewing young people as the country's future, the Government of Viet Nam attaches great importance to addressing youth issues, including the 10 priority areas of the World Programme of Action, which are interdependent and interlinked. In this statement I will touch upon three of them.

First, as regards youth and employment, in our National Youth Development Strategy to the Year 2010, which was approved by the Government in 2003, unemployment was identified as the biggest difficulty currently facing our young people. Many efforts, including policies, programmes and concrete measures, have been undertaken to address this problem. Vulnerable groups among young people, such as first-time job seekers, unskilled workers and young women, receive special attention in various job orientation and training activities. The Government's pro-poor policies and programmes provide for easier access to microcredits by young people, especially those living in poorer areas, so that they can start their own businesses. The Viet Nam Association of Young Entrepreneurs provides assistance to young people in starting up and running their businesses. As nearly 1.4 million young job seekers enter the labour market annually, our Government has set a target of creating 1.5 million new jobs each year.

The second area is youth and education. In order to secure a better chance at finding full and productive employment, it is imperative that young people receive adequate education and training. To this end, achieving Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2, universal primary education, is a must. During the 2003-2004 school year, the net primary enrolment rate was 94.4 per cent, while the completion rate rose to 99.82 per cent. If the current annual growth rate of 0.5 per cent is maintained, we will achieve universal primary education by 2015.

We have set a range of targets as contained in the Development Strategy for Training and Education for 2001-2010, the National Action Plan of Education for All for 2003-2015, the National Targeted Programme on Education and Training for 2001-2010 and the five-year and annual socio-economic development plans. Public resources allocated to education and training have constantly increased.

The third area is youth and poverty. The focus on employment and education, among other areas of priority, is a central part of our poverty reduction

strategy. Although the proportion of young people in poverty is lower than the national average in Viet Nam — 18 per cent compared to 24 per cent — we attach great importance to poverty reduction for young people. Our national targets include a 50 per cent reduction in the number of people living below the poverty line during the period 2001-2010. To achieve this, special attention is given to rural and remote areas and to minority groups.

The first survey assessment of Vietnamese youth was launched in August of this year. The survey noted in its chapter 1 that "The majority of Vietnamese young people are hardworking, strongly connected to their families, optimistic about the future and generally satisfied with their employment situation". It has also been observed that Viet Nam, with its high rates of literacy and numeracy, long experience with mass organizations and ability to mobilize people down to the village level, has sufficient absorptive capacity to continue moving forward in developing programmes and strategies for reducing poverty.

At this plenary meeting we are evaluating our individual national implementation of the World Programme of Action. There is an important aspect of this process of implementing the Programme that also needs to be emphasized: cooperation and assistance among countries and among young people from different countries in terms of experience-sharing, technical and financial assistance, training, et cetera. Such cooperation and assistance should and can be carried out at both regional and international levels.

In conclusion, young people are not only the beneficiaries of the aforementioned policies, programmes and targets. They are also the driving force in implementing those policies, programmes and targets. Investing in our youth means, as always, investing in our future.

Ms. Damsgaard-Larsen (Denmark): As a youth delegate in the Danish delegation to the sixtieth session of the General Assembly, and as a representative of the Danish Youth Council, it is a great honour and a privilege for me to address the Assembly. It is a great privilege because, in general, young people — and in particular young women — have a hard time getting their voices heard. Too often, decision-makers base their decisions on experiences that are not shared by all young people, and therefore the decisions do not always take into consideration our increasingly globalized world.

Too often, young people are not included in decisions that impact on their lives at both the national and the international levels. Those decisions could be improved or made more sustainable by including the perspectives of young people. Too often, young people are perceived to be associated with problems instead of solutions. In order to be solved, those problems need the involvement of young people.

Please, have confidence in young people. It is true that young people are indeed overrepresented in statistics related to negative issues. I would like to comment on two of those issues, HIV and terrorism. Half the world's HIV victims are infected before they turn 25, and disgruntled young men and women are in the frontline of terrorism and armed conflict. If we want to meet those and other major challenges, we must involve young people. Nothing will be achieved for young people without the participation of young people.

When it comes to the battle against AIDS, it is absolutely pivotal to encourage young people to follow the ABC strategy: abstain, be faithful or use condoms. As noted with respect to the Millennium Development Goals, only by sharply reducing the rate of HIV-prevalence among young people will we be able to stop the pandemic.

With respect to counter-terrorism measures, they should not be just about weapons. Equally important is shielding young people from totalitarian ideas by providing them with positive experiences of democracy and cultural tolerance.

We will not be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goals or our shared vision of a more peaceful planet unless young people are genuinely recognized and utilized as a resource in society. We can do much more nationally, as well as internationally, to involve young people in solving major problems in our global community.

First, it is important to compile detailed statistics and data on problems concerning young people. In that respect, the World Bank deserves credit for making young people the theme of its World Development Report 2007 and for consulting young people about which problems to include in the Report. The Bank has set an example.

Secondly, obligations already agreed should be met. The ideas set out in the World Programme of Action for Youth have yet to be fulfilled. Ten years after the Programme's adoption, a lot still needs to be done, and too many Member States have not given the Programme the attention it deserves.

Thirdly, we lack a comprehensive strategy for involving young people in the struggle to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Investing in young people is a prudent choice. There is a strong link between investing in young people and fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals.

And finally, there needs to be a stronger focus on young people's global awareness and their understanding of global issues. More education on global issues is needed to combat intolerance and promote international solidarity.

We ask for the recognition and the involvement of youth. We ask for tolerance and understanding, and we ask for implementation.

Numerous agreements have been signed to make poverty past history, provide education for all, promote the rights of the child and so on — agreements with great visions and ideas for a better world, agreements that call for action.

We need to make an extraordinary effort, if the visions expressed in agreements already signed are to become a reality. Increasing the involvement of young people will fuel much-needed implementation. It is quite interesting to note that the abbreviation of the World Programme of Action for Youth is "WPAY", which in English is pronounced "we pay", because I am certain that young people are willing to contribute. But if young people are to be encouraged to do so, they need to be involved in the decisions that define the solutions they will have to pay for. It is time for action. We all know what to do. Now, please let us do it.

Mr. Kariyawasam (Sri Lanka): The World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, adopted by the General Assembly in 1995 in resolution 50/81, gives us guidance for the formulation of our vision and policies for youth. It contains significant benchmarks and targets to be realized to make youth a central focus of national and international development agendas.

The vision for youth beyond 2000 that the World Programme of Action has fostered is designed to facilitate coherent and coordinated actions at multiple levels of Government and the international community. Its emphasis on the adoption of a multi-stakeholder approach, making youth key players, seeks to give youth a significant, participatory role and voice in national and local-level decision-making processes.

Today, 10 years after the Programme's adoption, we are meeting to review the situation of youth and the achievements made in implementing the World Programme of Action. In doing so, however, we must not ignore the factors that dominate the global issues of today but which were not discernible at the time of the Programme's adoption. Since that time, the world has changed in many ways that no one envisaged, and new obstacles and challenges have arisen as a result.

Considerable obstacles remain on achieving decent standards of social development. A notable constraint is the increased strain on precious resources, which are increasingly being diverted to meet new and emerging threats to peace, security, democracy and the rule of law. Other negative developments include the growing loss of domestic policy leverage as a result of globalization, the falling volume of the international trade of middle-income and less developed countries, increasing oil prices, the widening digital divide and the globalization of terror.

All those factors continue to severely affect many developing countries, especially middle-income and less developed countries. As a result, those countries have a severely limited ability to mobilize domestic resources, meaning that less attention can be given to vital sectors. The continued reduction in the quality of foreign aid, coupled with the growing strain on domestic resources, has only deepened the perception of inequality and inequity within societies. That stark, ongoing reality affects young people, who are so vital for the continued development of our societies.

Another contemporary phenomenon affecting youth in developing countries such as mine is large-scale migration abroad, as young people look for work and better living conditions. While that phenomenon helps both the receiving and sending countries, it has also created new challenges. In that regard, we are heartened that the outcome document of the recently concluded summit has referred to the issue of migration and that the next session of the General Assembly will discuss the issue of migration and development. Since the phenomenon of migration

primarily affects youth and their aspirations, it is essential that all United Nations agencies make every effort to mainstream the issue of migration in all its aspects.

I shall now say a few words about the progress made in implementing the World Programme of Action for Youth in Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has taken several steps to promote youth activities. Those include the promotion of youth clubs, the establishment of technical and vocational training centres and the organization of cultural exchanges and integration activities. Training activities are conducted in various fields to improve the skills and abilities of young people who leave school and guide them towards decent employment. Sports and recreation facilities contribute to nurturing a healthy generation of youth and create opportunities for the better utilization of time.

As a country with good social indicators, Sri Lanka has always given high priority to programmes related to youth and has taken into account the views and concerns of young people in formulating national policies and strategies, especially with respect to education and employment. The national action plans of Sri Lanka have focused on enhancing the quality of education and on providing equal opportunities for employment. Youth participation in sub-national and national decision-making processes has always been encouraged as a matter of national policy.

For many years throughout our 2,500-year recorded history, and especially since the provision of universal franchise for our people in 1931, we have been mindful that it is young people that make or break a society. Hence, we are committed to the welfare of youth in order to ensure the well-being of our society.

Mr. Peretin (Croat a): My name is Matej Peretin, and I am a youth delegate and a member of the Croatian delegation to the sixtieth session of the General Assembly. I am 14 years old and a first-year student at the Petar Preradović grammar school in Slatina, a town in northern Croatia. I was recently elected President of the Local Youth Council of Slatina, which operates within the framework of the Croatian National Youth Council.

Croatia has aligned itself with the statement of the European Union delivered by the United Kingdom. I wish to take this opportunity to describe how young people in Croatia have implemented, at the local level, the recommendations of the World Programme of Action for Youth and the relevant parts of the Millennium Goals.

Croatia has had a national youth policy since 2000. Among the key priorities of this policy are the participation of youth in decision-making, non-formal education and youth employment. Consistent with the call of the World Programme of Action for Youth for full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making, a National Youth Council was initiated and registered in Croatia in 2001. The Council operates as a national civil society organization, open to all young people in Croatia between the ages of 15 and 29.

The Croatian National Youth Council has signed a social partnership agreement with the Croatian Government, and the Government has approved the Council as a member of the State working group for the elaboration of a national programme of action for youth. In 2001, the President of the Council was invited to participate in the Croatian President's expert group for youth.

The Council has also represented the interests of Croatian youth at a number of international events, including, inter alia, the fourth session of the World Youth Forum, held in Dakar; the International Labour Organization Global Employment Forum; and the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Geneva. In 2005, the Council was awarded the World Youth Award by the World Assembly of Youth as one of the three most effective national youth councils globally. The Secretary-General of the Croatian National Youth Council serves as the Vice-President of the World Assembly of Youth.

The network of local youth councils in Croatia relies significantly upon information and communications technology. I invite delegates to visit the Croatian National Youth Council booth near Conference Room 4 here at United Nations Headquarters to learn more about the Council's governance and activities.

The Croatian delegation invites youth delegates and Governments of Member States to re-commit themselves to the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth. In this regard, we encourage Member States that have not yet done so to

consider adopting a full and effective youth participation agenda at all levels of Government in relation to the social, economic and political processes that concern young people. In Croatia, we have found that direct elections for local youth councils have been important in strengthening legitimacy. In addition, cooperation between local civil society organizations, governmental bodies and the private sector can be helpful in developing funding schemes for employment and educational opportunities for youth.

Finally, allow me to draw the Assembly's attention to a Croatian initiative. In 2002, we began negotiations on the establishment of a Croatian Youth Bank, focused on job creation for young people. In the same year, youth representatives from around the world gathered in Croatia and expressed their will to be included in the process of establishing a world youth bank. In 2002, a special resolution on a world youth bank was adopted by most representatives of national youth councils across the globe. The World Youth Bank Network, an international non-governmental organization that is the preparatory body for the establishment of a world youth bank, is now operating from its administrative headquarters in Zagreb. It is my pleasure to invite all participants to join us tomorrow at the World Youth Bank Project side event, which will focus on a potential strategy to address the global problem of the high level of youth unemployment. Members can also learn more about this project on the World Wide Web at www.w-yb.org.

Finally, allow me to express the intention of the Government of the Republic of Croatia to continue to attach special importance to the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth.

Ms. Hennouda (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): It is an honour for me to represent my country at this youth forum. We particularly welcome the presence of young people at the United Nations today, as well as the aspirations they are expressing.

The reports we are hearing today as we consider the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, adopted 10 years ago, give us a glimpse of the development of youth and assess the Programme's 10 priority areas so that we can fill the gaps. We note with satisfaction the increased awareness by States of the importance of young people's potential and of involving them in the decision-making process. We also welcome national efforts to ensure gender equality, and we encourage States to continue making progress on education and literacy.

However, continuing youth unemployment, the consequences of drug use and HIV/AIDS arouse our anxiety and concern, since they threaten the lives and environment of our young people.

The World Youth Report 2005 (*A/60/61*) draws our attention, in particular, to the impact of globalization and of the information and communications technology, which are described as additional issues of concern which youth and their leaders must face.

Certainly, globalization continues to give rise to ambivalent feelings, on the one hand because of its ability to create wealth and improve the material well-being of our societies, but, on the other, because of the phenomenon of exclusion that it creates. How can we diminish this exclusion? How can we move towards overall prosperity? How can we benefit from globalization, create jobs for young people and eradicate poverty? How can we ensure that information and telecommunications technology becomes a means for rapprochement, mutual understanding and the strengthening of links among young people throughout the world?

Today, we must find solutions to those questions in order to attain the goals we set at the time of the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth. Our Governments have the tasks of understanding globalization in order to better harness it, generating innovative ideas for job creation, steering young people away from drugs and protecting them from HIV/AIDS. To succeed, Governments must deal with those challenges together with young people by directly involving them in the identification of their problems and the search for solutions.

Algeria attaches great importance to young people, who constitute three quarters of the country's population. The country's public authorities, conscious of that reality, are making significant efforts to integrate that force for development into society, regardless of gender.

The Government has made a strategic and productive investment in education. All categories of public education institutions are free at all levels. Public education is mandatory and provided for all, and

we have achieved a 93.6 per cent rate of school attendance among young people. The Government has dealt with the issue of youth not enrolled in school through special measures to ensure their social and professional integration.

The national employment policy, which occupies an important place in overall Government policy, is supported by a national strategy aimed at fighting poverty and exclusion. The Government of my country has implemented alternative employment measures essentially managed by a network of agencies specialized in promoting youth employment.

The unemployment rate has been reduced thanks to innovative measures such as microcredits, the promotion of entrepreneurship, labour-intensive work of public utility, pre-employment contracts, local salaried employee initiatives and compensation for activities of general benefit. Many young people have been able to acquire professional experience and practical knowledge making them employable.

Determined to pursue its efforts and respond to the expectations of young people, Algeria has just carried out a study on their aspirations, resulting in a database on young people — girls and boys — of all professional categories, ages and education levels, with respect to their needs and aspirations in the numerous areas of their life such as their relationships with family, school and teachers, the street, youth establishments, health, languages, the role of women, sports, leisure activities, information and communication technologies, politics and the future.

That study has shown that, while progress has been made in various areas of concern to young people, domestic and international challenges, which are now interlinked, remain to be tackled. In response to globalization, the information society and communication technologies, at the domestic level we must promote leisure activities for young people as a means of social integration, provide quality education, ensure the highest level of professional qualifications among youth, create an environment favourable to our intellectual elite so as to halt their emigration, and ensure sustainable employment.

To achieve those goals, my country will once again consult young people to collect their opinions on the proposed solutions. We are convinced that the recommendations contained in the reports of the Secretary-General will provide relevant guidelines for our country's success in its mission.

The Acting President: I should like to inform the Assembly that the representatives of Lesotho and Nicaragua have requested to participate in this meeting. As the list of speakers was closed at 11 a.m. this morning, may I ask the Assembly whether there is any objection to the inclusion of those delegations in the list of speakers?

I see none. Lesotho and Nicaragua are therefore included in the list of speakers.

I remind speakers that we now have 16 speakers on our list for this meeting. Given the time limit and in order to accommodate all speakers for this meeting, I urge speakers to limit their statements to four minutes.

Ms. Mchiela (Malawi): Let me begin by aligning my delegation with the statement made by Mozambique on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). I would also like to congratulate the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report contained in document A/60/61.

The World Youth Report 2005 states that sub-Saharan Africa is home to large numbers of young people living in extreme poverty. It has been proven that when the health, education and employment needs of the youth are addressed in earnest, the result is poverty reduction, economic growth and human development. The international community has the moral obligation to match its youth-related programmes with the requisite resources.

Malawi attaches great importance to youth participation. We believe that the involvement of youth in decisions that affect society is beneficial from both a policy-making and a youth development perspective. We have learned over time that failure to acknowledge the particular challenges that youth face or to involve them in devising solutions leads to failure in reducing overall poverty levels. In recognition of that fact, the poverty reduction and economic growth strategies put in place by the Malawian Government have incorporated youth programmes.

Malawi has a national youth policy that guides youth development programmes and services with the full participation of young people at all levels. That has led to a mushrooming of youth clubs and non-governmental organizations.

Through its national AIDS commission, Malawi continues to implement programmes focusing on support, treatment and care for those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. In addition, the national plan of action for orphans and other vulnerable children was launched to deal with the unprecedented number of orphans and strengthen the capacity of families and communities to provide adequate care and support for those affected. A life-skills programme targeting youth is an important component of the action plan.

Convinced that empowering youth through education will enable them to have equal access to participation in the national development agenda, Malawi implemented universal free primary education under the national Education for All programme. Through that programme, the enrolment of pupils in primary schools increased tremendously. However, access to secondary and tertiary education remains a serious challenge for all children, particularly orphans and youth from poor families, owing to the lack of funds for school fees and other educational support. One initiative in that respect is the provision of student grants. Nevertheless, the number of beneficiaries is far inferior to the demand coming from of needy youth.

Mr. Gaspar Martins (Angola), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Malawi has implemented several initiatives to protect youth at risk of being abused. They include vocational skills training for self-help, training in entrepreneurship, the review of laws on child justice, care and protection and the training of social workers. Further, the Government has introduced measures such as the creation of a revolving fund for loans to youth to give young people access to financial capital to a set up small businesses.

Leisure activities are an important aspect of youth development. Malawi continues to establish youth centres in urban and rural areas. The aim of those centres is to engage youth in extra-curricular activities for their physical growth and mental development.

In conclusion, Malawi is committed to keeping youth issues high on its development agenda. I would also like to stress the critical importance of international cooperation if developing countries such as Malawi are to fulfil the Millennium Development Goals and the priority areas of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

Mr. García González (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): El Salvador fully endorses the statement of the Rio Group on this item.

The Government of El Salvador was committed to sending a high-level representative to this meeting to review the 10 years of the World Programme of Action for Youth: the Secretary of Youth, who holds a national office created in 2004 with the fundamental objective of ensuring the active participation of young people in decisions of national interest and on issues that directly affect youth.

However, two natural disasters of great destructive power — the eruption of the Ilamatepec volcano and the flooding caused by Tropical Storm Stan — have caused the death of 62 Salvadorans and the evacuation of 53,930 others throughout the country over the last three days, compelling our Government to declare a state of national emergency and to suspend official engagements scheduled for the present so that Government officials can attend first and foremost to the emergency.

Given the negative impact of those natural disasters on the sustainable development of our country, and given the vulnerability of young people, among other social groups, to natural disasters, we believe that we should focus our statement on the intrinsic links between hunger, poverty, the environment and situations of risk for young people, in particular the violence caused by the activities of youth gangs. Those issues fall within the three main clusters of issues proposed by the Secretary-General in his World Youth Report 2005 (*A/60/61*).

As President Elías Antonio Saca González noted in his address to the Assembly at the sixtieth session (*see A/60/PV.12*), in spite of our country's determined commitment to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, in particular the reduction of poverty and the fight against hunger, the negative impact on development caused by external factors such as costly fuel and natural disasters of the kind striking our country in recent weeks is cause for concern.

My country notes that those factors require a significant share of our human and financial resources, compelling us to redirect to those emergencies resources that could have been used in strategic areas of development. Thus, there is a clear link between the fight against poverty and hunger on the one hand and, on the other, the protection of the environment and the

reduction of vulnerabilities related to outstanding development issues.

Young people constitute the largest segment of the population of El Salvador. Thus, the policies and actions currently being implemented to tackle development challenges directly affect young people. El Salvador responded by appointing a Secretary of Youth, whose department is working, with broad participation, on a national youth policy.

That policy covers various objectives related to young people, such as improving their quality of life and their development at all levels and attending to the needs of vulnerable and marginalized sectors of youth. To achieve those objectives, concrete action is being taken in five main areas: promoting the independence of young people, promoting their well-being, developing awareness of their civic responsibilities, supporting the development of the creativity of youth and creating opportunities for vulnerable and marginalized youth.

As well, it is necessary to coordinate the various efforts and initiatives of the Office of the Secretary of Youth, public institutions and non-governmental and private-sector organizations involved in the promotion of youth issues, as well as those of youth organizations and movements, which are a focus and the beneficiaries of that national policy.

It is important to stress that the Government of El Salvador considers that young people represent not only the future hope of the country but also a source of great potential for the present. A sign of that commitment was the appointment of the Secretary of Youth, whose main tasks include the promotion of sport as a way to turn youth, and the general population, away from vice and idleness.

Allow me to conclude by recognizing the fact that in a globalized world, in which information technologies play an important role in highlighting areas of common interest for young people, it is increasingly clear that international cooperation, respect for the purposes and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and solidarity constitute the cornerstone for constructive progress in creating a society for all ages.

Ms. Taj El Diae (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, we express our gratitude for the holding of these meetings. We endorse the statement made by the representative of Argentina on behalf of the Rio Group.

First, we note that with everything that has been done over the past 10 years, the only result we have achieved is that the world's young people continue to suffer from hunger, poverty, unemployment and a lack of education, all of which are products of the dominant economic system. In other words, they are the result of the policies of the United States of America and its allies, which implement policies against the interests of the entire world, with the single objective of increasing exploitation and legitimizing and safeguarding its domination of the world's markets, resources and peoples.

By contrast, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has implemented a set of social measures within the framework of a holistic State social policy to promote economic and social development from a humanist perspective. In that context, our Government has been implementing a series of social programmes, called missions, aimed at integrating young people, in particular marginalized young people, into the social development of the country. Among them are the Robinson, Ribas and Sucre missions. The Robinson mission has succeeded in teaching more than 1.5 million people to read and write. In a few days, our country will be declared an illiteracy-free zone. More than 600,000 young people have graduated thanks to the Ribas mission. For economic reasons, those young people had never had the opportunity to pursue their secondary education, and have now done so without cost. Our Government even gives them a grant to carry out their studies. The Sucre mission is open to young people from the Ribas mission and to marginalized young people so that they can enter university.

In addition, young people in Venezuela are involved in the political life of the State. For example, citizens having reached the age of 21 can run for office as members of the National Assembly.

All those initiatives aim to fulfil the constitutional principle of a genuinely participatory and activist democracy, of the people, for the people and with the people.

In our countries, young people have a notable role in the fight against imperialism. In Venezuela, we are aware of the fact that young people of the entire world have been affected by the consequences of the

neo-liberal policies of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization and the Group of Eight. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening. Exploitation, hunger, unemployment, inadequate health care, poverty and destitution continue to grow as a result of imperialist economic and military policies that have catastrophic effects for millions of people throughout the world, including youth.

Our message is that we, the young, must fight against hunger and war and fight for peace, social justice, the self-determination of peoples and a world free of nuclear weapons. We must fight for our roots. We must fight for our traditions and cultures — in short, for our dignity. That is our foremost duty as young people. We must ensure that the world recognizes the value of those aspirations. It is also our duty to ensure that humankind survives the destruction that threatens our environment.

I recall once more the words of President Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías: neither our arms nor our souls shall rest until humankind has been saved.

Mr. Gómez Robledo (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a great honour for Mexico to participate in this meeting to assess progress in the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, which has seen the significant participation of young people from around the world. It would difficult to imagine implementing the World Programme of Action or achieving the Millennium Development Goals without the participation of young people. These meetings have shown that.

Mexico associates itself with the statement made by the delegation of Argentina on behalf of the Rio Group. We shall take this opportunity to share some of our experiences with implementation of the World Programme of Action.

Following the Programme's adoption, the bodies responsible for formulating and implementing Mexico's youth policies underwent a profound change. The Government formulated a youth strategy based on a recognition of the importance of the needs of youth, in particular economic issues, social inclusion, equity and respect for the diversity of youth, and affirming the principle of the full participation of youth in decision-making.

In accordance with that vision, the Mexican Youth Institute was created as a governmental body charged with designing and implementing a national policy for the full integration of youth in the country's development. With the Institute's coordination, the first national youth programme was established, its is a combined effort among young people, society and the Government. The national youth programme has three key goals: to promote the enhancement of the quality of life and well-being of young people, to generate areas of opportunity for the development of collective and individual abilities and to create equitable conditions for marginalized youth.

The participation of young people is a component of the national youth programme, because of their capacity for action and because such participation is needed for an effective assessment of their situation, as they are actors in national development. Recognizing the importance of their participation, the programme also aims to create conditions in which young people can engage in development activities, taking into consideration the country's varied conditions and pluralism.

The Mexican Youth Institute's various programmes seek to fully integrate young people into public life. Through dialogue mechanisms with a variety of sectors, the Institute promotes conditions for young people's access to opportunities for comprehensive development, the enhancement of quality of life and more complete participation in areas related to their aspirations and demands. In that way, the programmes have helped develop the participation of young people in civic life and promote a positive vision of youth, which, in turn, enables them to achieve better social integration.

Through that formula of dialogue and participation, the youth of Mexico have been made aware that Government stands by their side. The Government of the Republic consults them on the formulation of policies of concern to youth, such as those related to the implementation of the World Programme of Action. Our legislature recently held a first Model United Nations in the Congress. It brought together young people from all over the country and provided a valuable forum for understanding their concerns on important issues.

That effort is also reflected in the inclusion today, for the first time, of two young people in the delegation

of Mexico for this session of the General Assembly, which is a source of great satisfaction. Let us hope that this is only the beginning of an ongoing practice.

The new generation of Mexican youth is aware of the varied and multicultural nature of Mexican society. The Government is committed to implementing the World Programme of Action. Our progress in the 10 priority areas of the Programme has been shared with other countries of our region and was presented as a contribution to the report of the Secretary-General (*A/60/61*).

We support the inclusion of the five additional priority areas set out in draft resolution A/60/L.2. We are committed to continue taking the relevant measures to assess the situation of youth with respect to those areas and taking the corresponding action.

Mr. Samkharadze (Georgia): First, I would like to express my gratitude to the United Nations, the world's most important organization, and to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for giving young people of many countries the opportunity to speak before the Assembly on youth problems and how to solve them.

The Anti-drug Society, of which I am President, is a non-governmental organization in Georgia that has been fighting drugs since 1999. Student organizations from various institutions of higher education have joined our young anti-narcotics coalition. Working jointly, we are trying to crack down on the problem by arranging seminars, exhibitions and sports events.

I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly to several issues of concern to the peoples of the world, especially young people.

Today we are witnessing a critical trend: the number of young drug addicts is increasing rapidly. This is becoming a global problem with terrible consequences, because most drug addicts become socially unstable and often turn to crime. Unfortunately, such young people are not willing, nor do they have ability, to become full members of society or to be useful to it. We can even say that they are being lost as individuals and lost as citizens.

Narcotics and terrorism are interrelated, because narcotics are the main source of financing for terrorism. Also important is the harm done to economies, as countries are incurring losses of billions of dollars. Unfortunately, drug addicts often do not know that the money they pay for another dose of narcotics helps terrorists buy ultra-modern weapons and ammunition. In my opinion, this important aspect of the question merits particular attention. That money helps many terrorist organizations worldwide and enables terrorists to commit terrible acts almost every day, the world over. We young people must see that our peers think about this.

The ecological damage that the world is facing is no less important. Hundreds of thousands of acres of forests are cut down to produce drugs. Various chemicals and other dangerous substances from illegal laboratories are polluting lakes, rivers and seas and are harming both flora and fauna.

Another factor is psychological damage. Of course, this is by no means a complete list, but each of those issues includes elements with the potential for causing a major disaster. I think that this is an inarguable fact.

Political, economic, psychological and social sciences have given us a broad range of knowledge over the ages. It is important to organize the information into a kind of system and to analyse it properly. Only in that way will we be able to understand the facts.

The twenty-first century is a time of integrated thinking. I should like to take this unique opportunity to recall the events of 11 September 2001. I still cannot find a suitable definition for that destructive event, and I think I never will. One thing is obvious: an evil was done that cannot be undone.

In my opinion, the attack of 11 September was not just an attack on a particular building, country or people. It was an attack on the idea of democracy itself.

I want to address the youth of the world and ask them to unite in a resolute fight against drug addiction. We must not feed the monster which threatens us with destruction. We must explain the unpleasant truth to our peers: that with the money paid for each dose of drugs, which adds up to hundreds of billions of dollars throughout the world, terrorists do not build shelters for homeless children, hospitals or houses of worship; they use that money for their sick, vandalistic aims.

I am asking the Assembly to unite in the fight against drug addiction. We do not want the future to be in the hands of unstable individuals, which would be a

catastrophe and jeopardize the stability and the democratic development of humankind.

Ms. Amati (San Marino): "Youth is our future". I decided to begin my brief statement with this motto because I believe that these four words sum up what the Republic of San Marino, together with the United Nations, believes.

The world we live in has changed completely in recent decades, as we have achieved the important goal of globalization. My generation is particularly fortunate, because we have a chance to relate to other young people from all over the world. We can share our culture with them, and at the same time we get to learn about theirs.

I am very glad to have the chance to attend today's plenary meeting, dedicated to us, the youth of the world. The United Nations is the arena where we can best discuss our future.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan has stated that education is a human right. We could not agree more. The importance of education is multifaceted; it is the foundation of a more advanced and developed society.

One of most important actions we can take in favour of young people and of the advancement of our societies is to give our young people a good, sound education which will serve them well in future.

The Republic of San Marino believes that education must have first place on our scale of priorities. In order to provide a good education to young citizens, our Government not only invests economic resources in education but provides honour students with financial aid.

Education is based on both study and culture. Culture is what one gets from one's family, what one learns in one's country and from one's country; basically, it is one's history; everyone has his or her own.

In our culture, in San Marino, the family plays a key role in forming new generations. The relationship between young family members and their elders is very strong and allows young people to learn, from childhood on, valuable lessons about aspects of their background — lessons that will help them in future.

That is why I would like to encourage everyone present today to re-evaluate the needs of young people and to consider what their elders can give to them.

The Acting President: Brief, to the point and beautiful, like San Marino.

Mr. Rustom (Syrian Arab Republic): I should like to shed some light on the status of Syrian young people and on the challenges facing them in the third millennium.

Syria has a very young population; young people aged 15 to 25 constitute about 25 per cent of the total population. Moreover, the relatively high population growth rate — 24.5 births per 1,000 — is leading to an increase in the number of young people as a percentage of the total population. Furthermore, the number of students has increased, leading to higher public expenditures in the area of education, from 7.6 per cent in 1983 to 15 per cent in 2002.

This large number of young people is a great asset to the nation, but it also creates a number of challenges, which the Government has worked hard to face.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has consistently focused on education. It has ensured education for all by making it compulsory and free. Educational curricula are revised and modified regularly. For instance, counselling has been included in the educational curriculum since 2001, as well as foreign languages and information technology. In order to eradicate the stereotyped image of women, curricula were modified to include new concepts, such as gender equality. In addition, Syria has provided the necessary infrastructure to expand Internet service country-wide in order to encourage distance learning.

In the field of information technology (IT) and communications, Syria has developed a strategy for the relevant technologies. In that connection, many mechanisms have been put in place, such as the Syrian Higher Education and Research Network and, in 2002, the Virtual Learning University. Moreover, in 2004, ReefNet was launched in three villages through cooperation between the Ministry of Communications and Technology and the United Nations Development Programme.

The Ministry of Health, in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO), launched the Adolescent Health Programme in 2002, which targets the 10-19 age group, about 4.5 million inhabitants. The Programme aims to promote adolescent health standards through health education on health-related

issues in general, and on reproductive health in particular.

As for youth and HIV/AIDS, the Ministry of Health has adopted the National Programme for AIDS Control, which puts in place measures to prevent HIV infection and sexually transmitted diseases. Statistics reveal that the number of patients with HIV/AIDS reached 272 in 2002.

Drug abuse is not widespread among Syrian young people. The rate of addiction among the total population is 127 per million, and the incidence among young people under the age of 18 is even smaller. That is due to many factors — religious, social, familial and moral.

With regard to tobacco control, Syria ratified the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in 2003. The average number of cigarettes smoked by young people in Syria is about 3 per day.

Syria recently became a State party to the Youth Employment Network. The Syrian strategy on the employment of youth is going to be managed and implemented at all stages through community interaction, including partners from all sectors — the public, private and civil society. That strategy, which targets young people aged 18 to 25, aims to rehabilitate, qualify, train, and, subsequently, help young people to enter the labour market.

Syria has oriented all its development plans towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

With regard to young people and work in the private sector, many projects have been established, including the BIDAYA programme, whose mission is to work with young people and provide access to financial support for those with a viable business proposition who are unable to find help elsewhere. The word "bidaya" means "beginning" in Arabic. It is also an acronym for "Boosting and Inspiring Dynamic Youth Achievement". The programme will provide successful applicants with volunteer business mentors and full access to the organization's local and national business support network.

Another programme for young people, the Syrian Young Entrepreneurs' Association, was the brainchild of enthusiastic and dedicated young businesspeople who felt that they should make a contribution to the enhancement of the country's business community by tapping the resources of its most dynamic constituents, young people. The Syrian Young Entrepreneurs' Association is a non-governmental non-profit organization that strives to inspire a strong entrepreneurial mindset and skills among Syria's promising young people. It aims to enhance their professional and personal competencies in the national and global economy. Moreover, the programme seeks to provide a clearinghouse for local and expatriate experiences, thereby ensuring a prosperous future for Syria.

Syria's juvenile delinquency law of 1974 considers delinquent juveniles to be victims. In 2004, the Ministry of the Interior, in cooperation with UNICEF, held three training workshops for officers and agents of the criminal security service and the police force on how to interrogate and deal with juveniles.

Finally, I would like to refer to the role of the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and its contribution to the welfare of young people. The Commission has shouldered the responsibility for developing the Syrian Arab Republic's national strategy for young people, by, inter alia, establishing the Youth National Committee, whose members represent all the ministries and State institutions working on youth-related issues, in addition to non-governmental organizations and programmes focusing on young people. In general, when performing its tasks the Commission takes into consideration issues related to gender, people with special needs and refugees.

Finally, I would like to express our appreciation for the initiative taken by the United Nations to listen to the voices of Member States' young people, as well as to improve its plans to secure a better future for humankind.

Mr. Atsou (Togo) (*spoke in French*): It is an honour for me to speak on behalf of roughly half of the five million inhabitants of Togo, who are young people, in order to convey to the General Assembly the efforts Togo has made to implement the World Programme of Action for Youth.

Allow me to welcome the presence among us of other delegations, as well as the ongoing efforts they are making to ensure that young people are able to participate in society.

Following summit-level conferences organized by the United Nations, humankind has become aware of the need to address the issue of development comprehensively. Greater consideration of the matter has made it possible for us to understand the role and invaluable contribution of young people in the process of building a global economy that meets the needs of all, as well as their capacity and willingness to contribute to the lives of their societies. The world as a whole has also become aware of the risks to which young people are exposed.

The Millennium Declaration and the World Programme of Action for Youth, which was adopted by Member States 10 years ago, are the results of that awareness. Those tools were conceived with the goal of ameliorating the difficult problems that rob young people of any chance for development, namely, hunger, poverty, unemployment, juvenile delinquency, drug addiction, HIV/AIDS, gender-based discrimination, conflict and marginalization. Those obstacles, among others, have impeded us from attaining the desired results. With regard to Togo, there are two main reasons for the lack of progress in implementing the commitments of the World Programme of Action for Youth.

On the one hand, despite the Government's good will and that of young people's groups and other actors, the lack of financial resources — a characteristic of most developing States — has been the major limitation to every policy aimed at improving the living standards of young people. Moreover, Togo has suffered for more than 13 years — and continues to suffer today — from the breakdown in assistance from its main development partners.

On the other hand, in the context of an unfavourable economic environment, the structural adjustment measures recommended by the Bretton Woods institutions have contributed to a suspension of recruitment in the public sector. Adding to that the low rate at which the private sector is able to absorb young people seeking work and the political crisis in the country, it is easy to understand why Togo's young people are facing the problems of unemployment, poverty and the other scourges I have mentioned. Nevertheless, Togo's young people are today pleased to see that all indicators point to a promising new future.

President Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé has placed the problems of young people at the centre of his programme to structure society on the basis of 20 commitments. Providing decent employment for young people, extending credit to young entrepreneurs, giving universities the logistical and human resources needed to provide good training for young people, and full and effective participation by youth in the political, economic and social life of the country, are among the main policies of the programme established by Togo's President.

The Government's meaningful policy of according close attention to the problems of young people has led to the establishment of the first-ever State secretariat devoted solely to improving conditions for young people. This is a tool that henceforth will make it possible for us to be the leading actors in the transformation of society. In addition, the programme of action put forth by the National Union Government, which was made public on 4 July 2005, sends a strong signal testifying to the resolute determination of the Government of Togo to place the improvement of the living conditions of its young people at the centre of its concerns.

Less than 100 days since the establishment of the National Union Government, the hopes aroused by that event have already been justified vis-à-vis the 10 priority areas targeted by the World Programme of Action for Youth. In the interests of time, I shall limit myself to pointing out only some of the efforts undertaken in a few areas.

With regard to education, the section in the Government of Togo's programme of action devoted to social development includes significant steps that should guarantee a quality education for all of Togo's young people. Special emphasis has been placed on the situation of teachers, who are mostly young people themselves. The Government has committed itself to ensure quality education, not only by giving teachers appropriate quality training, but also by providing them working conditions conducive to giving young pupils sound instruction and providing free primary education in order to reach the goal of ensuring schooling for all by 2015. For their part, students will be encouraged to excel by the granting of prizes.

In the areas of employment, poverty and hunger, the Government of Togo has taken several steps by which young people will become the most important stakeholders in the building of the Togolese economy. In that connection, the Prime Minister stated that Togo

would do everything necessary with regard to employment in order to ensure that the greatest number of young people possible will be able to benefit from employment as soon as possible. They will be the first beneficiaries of the employment and self-employment programme to be established by the Government. They will also be active participants in the reconstruction and consolidation work we are going to undertake.

Putting the Government's words into action, only some 45 days following the unveiling of its programme, a first wave of 1,700 young teachers were recruited into the civil service. That will be followed by a second wave in the weeks to come.

The provision of grants to young people, which was also announced in the programme, will allow us to promote self-employment through the establishment of small- and medium-sized business. That will make it possible to reduce considerably the number of the unemployed, thereby also addressing the complicated issue of poverty. For their part, young people's groups and non-governmental organizations (NGO) working in Togo will also contribute to the extent they are able.

In that connection, I would like to commend the efforts of NGOs to halt the social crisis. Despite that, however, their efforts to improve the living conditions of young people through sustainable development have been very limited for many years.

We would therefore like to use the forum provided by the General Assembly to launch, on behalf of Togo's young people, a resounding and solemn appeal aimed at all organizations, associations and other development partners to trust our country and to extend their assistance to our young people, as well as to our Government and our NGOs, in order that we may overcome the challenges of poverty and hunger and the other scourges that particularly afflict young people.

Mr. Ampem (Ghana): May I express my gratitude for the opportunity to address the General Assembly on behalf of the young people of Ghana. May I also congratulate the United Nations on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond and on the successes in overcoming the challenges regarding its implementation thus far.

Ghana as a country has drawn much inspiration from the World Programme of Action for Youth since its adoption in 1995, and has been taking bold steps towards the development of Ghanaian young people. A revised national youth policy, which was developed on the basis of the 10 priority areas identified in the World Programme of Action for Youth, is under active consideration. Youth organizations under the coordination of the Ghana National Youth Council have also developed a national youth charter to express our priorities as Ghanaian young people. It should be given attention by all.

In order to further reduce unemployment among young people in the country, the Government has established the National Youth Fund, which is aimed at assisting the country's young people with funding to establish small-scale enterprises.

Another modest achievement thus far worth mentioning is the introduction of free primary education in the country, which we hope will increase enrolment.

Like many others in the African region, but unlike their counterparts in developed countries, Ghanaian young people benefit the least from today's globalization. Issues regarding unfair trade and competition must be seriously addressed if we are genuinely committed to the full integration of the world's economies and societies, as defined by the World Programme of Action for Youth.

We also ask for well-coordinated and intensive exchange programmes between young people's organizations in the North and the South in order to facilitate the exchange of ideas and the spread of innovation. May I take this opportunity to commend the National Council of Swedish Youth Organizations (LSU) for taking a bold initiative in that regard. A case in point is the cooperation between the LSU and the National Union of Ghana Students.

Ghana strongly supports the call for youth-led development, but would like to advise that we not lose sight of the need to tap the rich experiences gained by older generations over the years. There should be a blend of youthful zeal and the experiences of older persons.

It is gratifying to note that the international community is committed to solving the problem of youth unemployment in the world. We wish to propose that we ensure that the lion's share of the resources meant to achieve that are directed to regions of the

world where there is a larger percentage of young people — such as Asia and Africa — and where youth unemployment is also the highest.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize that the successful implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth and the Millennium Development Goals will depend to a large extent upon the vibrancy of our civil societies. Developing nations must therefore be encouraged and assisted to develop their civil societies and non-governmental organizations, particularly those related to youth development.

Ms. Al-Hajri (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to express to the President the gratitude of the delegation of Qatar for having organized this tenth anniversary meeting on the World Programme of Action for Youth for the Year 2000 and Beyond, as well as on the Millennium Development Goals that were adopted after the Programme. Efforts have been made at the regional, national and international levels; however, there is still much to be done to reach the Programme's goals.

The report of the Secretary-General entitled "World Youth Report 2005" (*A/60/61*) presents the issues and invites us to work hard to find expeditious and appropriate solutions. The report states that there are over 720 million young people living on two dollars a day or less. Many must also deal with drug problems and diseases such as AIDS. The gap between young people in developed and developing countries is very wide. We must try to bridge that gap, especially as regards the areas of educational technology and development, given their effects on young people.

The State of Qatar has been working on all levels to ensure a prosperous future for young people. Our official efforts, as well as those of the private sector and civil society institutions, have been geared towards improving the lives of young people. Our Supreme Council for Family Affairs, in particular the Department for Youth, has developed a national strategy for youth.

Education in Qatar is guaranteed to all students, and it is compulsory at the primary and secondary levels. We are now focusing our efforts on providing high quality education at all stages, especially at the university level. We have established an education city, where our major universities operate branches. We have also focused our efforts on establishing scientific research centres. We have set up centres open to students at all levels, where students practice elections and learn about democracy. We have also integrated disabled persons into teaching programmes.

In order to create employment opportunities, there is coordination between the Government and the private sector to employ young people.

Given that the scourge of drugs is an international phenomenon, we have worked to protect young people from the dangers of drugs. We have also worked with international institutions to cooperate in this area. Our Supreme Council for Family Affairs is working with the Centro Italiano di Solidaritá and with United Nations bodies to create opportunities for young people.

The efforts of the State of Qatar are not limited to its own young people. We have also worked with international organizations to help friendly and fraternal countries. That work includes a project under the auspices of the spouse of His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani and in cooperation with UNESCO to assist Iraqi universities. Qatar has allocated $15 million for that purpose.

Our universities are also open to all young people from around the world.

We must make every effort to ensure a prosperous future for young people everywhere. The United Nations system should contribute advisory and training services to improve the capacities of our young people.

Mr. Al-Ghannam (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the young people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, I would like to thank the Secretariat for organizing this international debate to assess the progress made in the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth and to provide an opportunity for young people to raise questions with regard to their prospects and aspirations, as well as to take part in the search for solutions.

Allow me to draw the Assembly's attention to a signal and very positive pioneering experience of Saudi young people — who make up more than two thirds of Saudi society — that took place under the auspices of the King Abdul Aziz Centre for National Dialogue.

That Centre works to foster a culture of dialogue in society that discusses issues of national interest at all levels and proposes recommendations for action.

The Centre has made issues impacting young people a national priority.

A national meeting was held in Saudi Arabia under the theme "Questions of youth: realities and aspirations". Twenty-six preparatory workshops were held prior to the meeting, in which 650 young men and women participated, representing young people aged 16 to 25 in groups of 25 men and 25 women from each province. The goals of the workshops were to promote dialogue among young people, identify and discuss issues and ideas specific to them and, lastly, to consider proposals and work programmes to be submitted to decision-makers. Many people took part in those workshops, including scientists, intellectual and educated people of both genders and a great number of young men and women. Saudis participating in the workshops had an opportunity to ask many questions and to discuss issues of interest, including continuation of constructive dialogue.

In conclusion, those efforts have begun to bear fruit. They represent an initiative that is led by Saudi Arabia's young people themselves. They are our hope and we rely heavily on them.

Mr. Treminio Rivera (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to say that I share the pain of the people and Government of El Salvador in connection with the difficulties caused by the hurricane. I hope that they will be able to overcome those problems.

Nicaragua is not only a country of lakes and volcanoes; it is also a country full of young people. Over 70 per cent of the population of Nicaragua is under the age of 30. The group of those aged 18 to 30 now represents 23 per cent of the population. However, by 2015 that group will double to make up 47 per cent of the population, and the group of those aged 0 to 15, which now makes up 46.5 per cent, will shrink by half. That means that the Government of Nicaragua should invest in young people today more than ever before. However, doing so would clearly not be just for the sake of providing replacements for the workforce. It would also be to try to ensure that Nicaraguan young people can become more independent, develop their capacities and enjoy a higher level of participation in society.

When we began to draft social policy for young people in Nicaragua, we tried to ensure that we did so while making those policies part of other national social policies and, ultimately, overall State policy.

Allow me to touch on the positive and negative aspects of the situation of young people in Nicaragua in recent years. Young people in Nicaragua lived through a war in which more than 50,000 of them died. Today, as before, we continue to have many problems.

The very high rate of teen pregnancy has resulted in an equally high maternal mortality rate among young women. People of working age in the 25-to-49-year age bracket have only 7.1 years of schooling on average — that is to say, they do not even have the 12 years of schooling normally recommended by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Adolescents have on average 5.1 years of schooling. Thus, given the situation facing young Nicaraguans, the Government of Nicaragua has over the past three and half years developed a youth action programme aimed at addressing those problems. It is endeavouring to elaborate future policies to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS, and it will work with the Ministry of Health to see to it that people living with HIV/AIDS have access to antiretroviral treatment. The Ministry of Education also must undertake training and educational projects aimed at limiting the pandemic.

Next year we will be carrying out the first youth survey, which will give us an initial baseline as to the actual situation of youth and thereby help us adapt our intervention planning aimed at young people.

Access to information and telecommunications technologies is also a challenge for our Government. That is why we have begun to develop neighbourhood telecommunications centres, thereby narrowing the information gap between young people who have access to such information and those who do not.

No less important are sex education programmes, aimed at reducing the number of teen pregnancies and at bringing the Nicaraguan people, especially young people, to a point where the demographic growth rate is lower than the rate of economic growth.

Clearly, however, none of the efforts being made by the Government of Nicaragua will come to fruition if we cannot resolve the structural problems facing our country and developing countries in particular. One important challenge is to reduce external debt with respect to bilateral agencies and to certain countries. Another important goal is to ensure sustainable economic growth over the next 25 years at an annual rate of 7 per cent, which will enable us to implement

state policies that will well and truly resolve the problems facing Nicaragua's young people.

I should like to join those who have expressed their congratulations to the Ibero-American Youth Organization. Indeed, on 10 and 11 October, we will be signing the Convention on the Rights of Young People in Latin America in Badajoz, Spain.

I should like to conclude my statement with some thoughts that summarize what youth, and education for youth, means to my Government:

> "If your projects are for one year, plant seeds. If they are for 10 years, plant a tree. If your projects are for 100 years, then educate the people. That is because if you plant seeds, you will get one crop. If you plant a tree, you will get 10. But if you educate the people, you will have crops forever."

The Acting President: I should like to inform the Assembly that the representative of Haiti has asked to participate in this meeting. Inasmuch as the list of speakers was closed at 11 a.m. today, may I ask the Assembly whether there is any objection to this inclusion of that delegation in the list of speakers.

I see no objection.

Ms. Louis (Haiti) (*spoke in French*): When I learned that I had been appointed by the Secretary of State for Youth to represent Haitian youth at the General Assembly, I hesitated, because on the one hand I know how complex and multifaceted the needs of youth are, and, on the other, I was unsure about the follow-up to such an event. But, aware that this is an appropriate forum for voicing the claims of our young people, we have come here in the hope that they will be heard and taken into account.

Haitian youth is living and developing in an environment of constant deterioration. It is deprived of all socio-economic and institutional opportunities, and it cannot flourish at the cultural level. Infrastructure for education, health care, professional training, public hygiene and recreation is lacking, which hinders the development of the collective social conscience that is necessary if we are to transform the existing socio-economic structure into a modern and effective production mechanism.

Despite our Government's efforts vis-à-vis Haitian youth, we have been unable to devise a policy aimed at promoting the physical and intellectual development of young people — even less so with regard to socio-professional development, which could promote a transition to independence.

Ten years after the elaboration of the Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, and despite the many recommendations made for youth, the situation of young Haitians has not improved. For several decades now, the number of young people in Haiti has been growing. Demographically speaking, it is clear that they now represent a significant percentage of our population. In 1997, those aged 15 to 24 years represented 30 per cent of the population. As the growth rate is nearly 2 per cent annually, just imagine what the employment situation is today.

According to a 1995 United Nations Development Programme report, the unemployment rate was then at 65 per cent. The socio-political crisis, which grew worse in 2002, is affecting various sectors of the economy and is having a devastating impact on social indicators. We believe that unemployment will continue so long as the political crisis is not resolved and so long as there is not greater involvement on the part of young people in the context of a national youth policy that takes account of the Millennium Development Goals and of the actual needs of youth.

HIV/AIDS is one of the greatest challenges of the twenty-first century. As in the rest of the world, it is having major repercussions for Haitian youth. The most affected are young people aged 15 to 24, and those figures are continuing to rise. The situation is having a negative impact on the development process in the country. Furthermore, young people who are trying to protect themselves from possible HIV/AIDS infection are having a difficult time getting access to information, counselling, screening and treatment.

In the light of those conditions, it is evident that the limited labour market has no place for urban or rural youth. That largely explains the phenomenon of boat people prevalent among young people. Young people are driven to migrate. They take to the seas on flimsy watercraft in search of new horizons. Among them are young people from rural areas who do not have access to education or plots of land and others who had bad luck on their high school exams, along with all other types of young people, coming from all over the country in search of better economic prospects. The great majority of those potential

immigrants end up living in the shanty towns of Port-au-Prince, where they become involved in criminal activity and are used to foment the climate of insecurity that has existed in the country for several years, since the departure of former President Aristide.

With regard to unemployment and the precariousness of education and social life, Haitian youth are now considering the best type of programme to adopt for our circumstances. One thing is certain: the policies proposed for industrialized countries are not applicable in our situation. We therefore propose that the United Nations support our Government in the following manner.

Studies should be designed and carried out on the socio-economic situation of young people in order to create programmes that take their real needs into account. The international community should support the Government of Haiti in implementing a programme for the social, cultural and intellectual development of young people. A space should be created within the United Nations for youth representatives from various countries to meet and discuss their problems and the solutions. In Haiti, the Secretary of State for Youth should be replaced with a Ministry for Youth in order to make actions for youth more effective. I hope those recommendations will receive consideration.

Mr. Matlosa (Lesotho): I am honoured to have this opportunity to address the Assembly.

Lesotho is one of the poorest nations in the world and has the third highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in the world. The epidemic's magnitude threatens the very existence of our nation and makes the fight to carry out the World Programme of Action for Youth all the more difficult, if not outright impossible. Youth must wage war against the epidemic, but that war will be unlike any other war that youth have fought before. The enemy has crept unnoticed into communities and households, and the silent killer is waging war from within.

Through the World Programme of Action for Youth, the United Nations must urgently elaborate a strategy for its battle plan, seek the assistance of allies, recruit, train and equip troops and allocate enough resources to engage and destroy the enemy. The United Nations remains our strongest ally in this war. It should also allocate more resources to that war and remain determined in helping youth emerge victorious.

From my statement, it is clear that HIV/AIDS is one of the biggest obstacles to achieving our goals in the World Programme of Action for Youth, as well as the overall development of the youth. While Lesotho has made tremendous progress in its efforts to provide the fundamental elements needed to improve livelihoods, young people face considerable development challenges, primarily due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In a country with one of the highest infection rates, now estimated at approximately 30 per cent, the youth of Lesotho are facing an unprecedented challenge. The pandemic, combined with deep-rooted poverty and food insecurity, is causing a new kind of vulnerability, affecting almost every young person in Lesotho. The consequence is a gradual undermining of the social and economic fabric that makes up the society of Lesotho. The pandemic has a great effect on youth, weakening family and social coping mechanisms.

Youth are in crisis. That complex crisis can be seen in its negative impact on youth development, and in particular on the realization of the World Programme of Action for Youth. However, the socio-political climate now prevailing in most developing countries provides a real opportunity to effectively address youth development challenges such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, poverty and hunger, unemployment, globalization and gender equality.

For us in the developing countries, the idea of achieving the goals of the World Programme of Action for Youth is just a dream. Our dream can be made a reality through further support and investment from the United Nations and developed countries.

Today, we young people live in a world that you adults and our forefathers have made. Tomorrow, you will live in a world that we will make. When you make decisions, think of the world in which you would like to live in the future. Our crisis can be turned into an opportunity. Young people, let us all rally to the battle cry and make a difference.

The Acting President: I now call on the observer of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Mr. Dionisio (Holy See): My delegation is pleased to participate in this important discussion on the World Programme of Action for Youth. It was once said, flippantly, that youth is wasted on the young. Nevertheless, the Holy See is pleased that the United

Nations continues to have high regard for the importance of young people.

Recently, at a gathering of hundreds of thousands of young people in Cologne, Germany, Pope Benedict XVI echoed the sentiments of young people around the world when he said, "We are concerned for the state of the world and we are asking, 'where do I find standards to live by and what are the criteria that govern responsible cooperation in building the present and the future of our world?'"

Young people aspire to be great. But to achieve greatness, they must be mindful of others, especially those in need. Nor can they achieve greatness alone. They need the leadership and the resources of Governments, the interest and the cooperation of non-governmental organizations and the goodwill and hard work of all people.

In the light of that concern, my delegation has carefully followed developments since the launch 10 years ago of the World Programme of Action for Youth. Its 10 priority areas for action touched upon significant issues and themes that affect the lives of young people and our world.

The Secretary-General's World Youth Report 2005 (*A/60/61*) returns to troubling elements that still affect young people's lives today. Addressing one of those concerns, my delegation reaffirms its position on the use of the expression "sexual and reproductive health", as contained in the report. My delegation understands the concept as the holistic promotion of the health of women, men, youth and children. It does not consider abortion or access to abortion to be a dimension of that term.

The Holy See also continues to be fully committed to the role of youth in the context of the global economy, poverty, education and employment. There are currently more than 196,000 Catholic primary and secondary schools worldwide, attended by more than 51 million children and young people. Furthermore, there are almost 1,000 Catholic universities, colleges and other institutes, educating more than 4 million young adults. Young people are being helped to receive the education they deserve and are encouraged to give back to others. Education is the gift that continues to give.

The President returned to the Chair.

With respect to youth in relation to society, the environment, leisure and participation, the Catholic Church, through the activities of thousands of youth groups throughout the world, promotes the importance of caring for oneself, for the environment and for one's peers.

Almost 12,000 Catholic hospitals and other health-care and preventive medicine institutions throughout the world are working to address problems related to youth at risk, including health issues, drugs, delinquency and discrimination against girls and young women. Trained local professionals working in such institutions support the principle that all human life is sacred, and that each person has worth. The young are cared for as precious and vulnerable members of society.

The ability to accomplish specific goals in the 10 priority areas comes down to commitment. The round-table discussions on young people called it "making commitments that matter". We know that we live in a complex and complicated world, and many young people know that such a commitment requires three things: recognizing needs, especially in the poorest countries of our world; planning a response; and following through.

The Holy See encourages the United Nations to continue to identify the needs of the world's young people, especially the poorest and weakest of them. It further recommits itself to working together with the international community to develop realistic, appropriate, immediate and long-term responses. Building a better world is a lifelong process. Oftentimes, it is a very long journey. But young people recognize that their journey is just beginning. And, precisely because they are young, they are still at the initial stages of paving a path for success in the future.

Every person of every age matters as we work together to build a world in which young people can feel safe and happy.

The President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 3369 (XXX) of 10 October 1975, I call on the observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Mr. Husain (Organization of the Islamic Conference): It is a privilege for me to address the General Assembly on the occasion of its review of the progress made in the implementation of the World

Programme of Action for Youth, which the Assembly adopted 10 years ago.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) expresses its full support for the initiatives being undertaken by Governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations worldwide for the observance of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth. In doing so, we recall with pride and pleasure the role and active participation of OIC member States in the drafting and adoption of the Programme of Action and in its implementation at the national, regional and global levels.

The results of those planned endeavours are now before us, meticulously detailed in the Secretary-General's report (*A/60/61*) and described in our debate by speakers from all over the world, including from OIC member States.

What is emerging from this invaluable interchange of ideas and experiences is the fact that, while advances have been made to varying degrees in the 10 priority areas on which the Programme of Action focuses, the expectations raised in 1995 have not been met. In 2005, over 200 million young people are living in poverty; 130 million are illiterate; 88 million are unemployed; and — something that was not, perhaps, fully foreseen 10 years ago — 10 million young people are now living with HIV/AIDS.

We have no option but to share the Secretary-General's view that, given such stark and startling realities, the case for renewing our commitment to the goals of the World Programme of Action could not be clearer. In fact, there is a stronger case now for augmenting the 10 priority issues of 1995 by another five, as identified in the World Youth Report 2003 (*E/CN.5/2003/4*), and subsequently noted by the Assembly in resolution 58/133.

We would like to take this opportunity to bring to the Assembly's attention some of the developments that are under way in the OIC in support of the interests of youth. First, the Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation has been established. The Forum, whose headquarters are in Istanbul, will, among other things, become a credible source of information and advice on national youth policy issues, coordinate the activities of national youth organizations in OIC member States and Muslim communities in non-member States, and assist with capacity-building measures, including the training of youth leaders in advocacy and organizational roles.

Those two examples should give representatives a sense of the OIC's commitment to the welfare and development of youth. Those commitments do not exist in isolation, but reflect the emphasis placed by our organization on the promotion of Islamic family values and, in that context, on efforts to address the needs of the various elements of the family, including men, women, children and youth.

In conclusion, we believe that, with renewed strength, the family — the basic social unit of society — should provide the tools for the development of a morally upright and economically stable, healthy and viable society. It should also create an environment for harmonious and productive lives to be lived by all members of the human family, including youth, on whose shoulders will fall the responsibility of creating the global village, which is our destination in the new millennium, which we recently entered.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate at this meeting devoted to the evaluation of the progress made in the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/60/L.2, entitled "Policies and programmes involving youth", as orally revised.

The list of additional sponsors — like the original list of sponsors — is impressive. The following countries have added their names to the list of sponsors of draft resolution A/60/L.2: Algeria, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, China, the Congo, Djibouti, Fiji, Gabon, Israel, Jamaica, Malawi, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ukraine and the United Republic of Tanzania.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/60/L.2, as orally revised?

Draft resolution A/60/L.2, as orally revised, was adopted (resolution 60/2).

The President: Before giving the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, who wishes to speak in explanation of position on the resolution just adopted, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote or position are limited to 10

minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Ms. García-Matos (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela wishes to express its strong reservation with regard to paragraph 7 of draft resolution A/60/L.2. We totally disagree with the contents of that paragraph, which mentions the outcome document (*resolution 60/1*) of the High-level Plenary Meeting of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly. We consider that document to be null and void and as having no effect for the Republic.

The President: We have heard the only speaker in explanation of position.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Ms. Shestack (United States of America): The United States is exercising its right of reply in response to the statement made this morning by the representative of Cuba.

The United States trade embargo against Cuba is a bilateral issue that should not come before the General Assembly. In bringing attention to that issue, Cuba is simply attempting to blame the communist regime's failed economic policies on the United States and to divert attention from its human rights record.

Let us remember that the United States is the single largest source of humanitarian assistance to Cuba. Let there be no doubt: if Cubans are jobless or hungry, it is because of the failings of the current Government. That Government has shown no interest whatsoever in implementing any economic or political reform that would lead to democratic change and a free-market economy. That kind of economic mismanagement is the reason why a country that 45 years ago had a per capita income equal to that of Spain is now one of Latin America's most economically desperate.

The Cuban Government is not a victim, as it contends. Rather, it is a tyrant aggressively punishing anyone who dares to have a differing opinion. Castro has steadfastly refused to allow any kind of political opening, and he continues to deny Cubans human rights and fundamental freedoms as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We, for one, cannot support an economic opening with a country with such an abysmal record on economic and political issues.

Ms. Thomas (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba is not trying to blame the United States. Actually, the United States is only blaming itself; it does not need our help. It is blaming itself by not complying with the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly over the past 13 years calling for a lifting of the blockade. It is blaming itself when it adopts extraterritorial laws against Cuba hardening the blockade even more and when it applies them so brutally.

The prosperous Cuba of before 1 January 1959 that the representative of the United States is talking about was a Cuba of 2 million illiterate people — 40 per cent of the population. It was a Cuba of half a million unschooled children, 10,000 unemployed schoolteachers and a jobless rate of 24 per cent, with young people the majority of the unemployed. It was a Cuba of drunken American marines on the streets of Havana, defiling our national monuments, and of Fulgencio Batista, killing and torturing students with the tacit complicity of American leaders.

The United States delegation is trying to convince those in this Hall that the blockade is nothing more than a Cuban excuse for our problems. It is trying to be my country's judge and prosecutor, using the argument that we supposedly lack democracy and violate human rights. Not only does it ignore Cuba's globally recognized progress in the social arena and in caring for young people and children, but it is lying once again to the members of the Assembly when it tries to present the economic, commercial and financial blockade against Cuba as a bilateral issue.

Only a racist, fascist, arrogant, haughty and, indeed, disturbed mentality such as that of the current President of the United States, Mr. Bush, could maintain the criminal blockade against Cuba. In practice, the blockade policy amounts to an actual economic war waged by the United States against my country for more than 40 years without any limits, whether ethical, moral or related to State obligations under international law governed by the United Nations.

Never has a country been subjected so continuously to the danger represented by such a

powerful neighbour, which, historically, has tried to dominate and annex us for more than two centuries. The United States has run out of pretexts for explaining the maintenance of the criminal blockade and other anti-Cuban measures. That is why it clings to the issue of our supposed violations of human rights. That is the fig leaf with which it covers itself.

The world knows that for the past 46 years, Cuba has been a thorn in the side of the world's only super-Power, the United States. When it becomes irritated, it sets in motion a campaign of disinformation, blackmail and pressure. However, the thorn — personified in Fidel Castro — remains intact and is increasingly robust.

Everyone here is aware that what the United States delegation is trying to do on behalf of its Government is to stigmatize Cuba for our unyielding rebellion against the unjust imperialist world order; for our staunch defence of our independence and sovereignty; for our decision to make our own way without accepting external interference; for the example set by our truly participatory and popular democracy; for the example set by our achievements, including our education and health rates, our full employment and our social justice for all, despite the cruel and prolonged blockade that our people have had for so long to endure; and for the example we set by providing solidarity and sharing what we have with those who have nothing in this world.

The Government of United States has not the slightest moral qualification to speak about Cuba or any other country represented in this Hall. The Government that is accusing Cuba today is the one that has sent thousands of its young people to die in wars launched under lying pretexts now internationally recognized as such. It is the Government that directed — indeed, participated in — the bombing of cities. The Government that is accusing Cuba today is the one that was unable to take measures in time to prevent the disaster caused in New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina.

In Cuba, we learned long ago to raise dignity as high as palm trees, and there will be no turning back. Cuba will not rest in its struggle, will not surrender, will never make concessions, will never fail to speak up. We will always stand alongside those who are not resigned, those who put their faith in the value of ideas and principles, those who do not give up the dream of achieving full justice for all in a better world.

The President: I should now like to say a few final words as President of the General Assembly.

Yesterday and today have been marked by a strong presence of both the present and the future in this Hall. I refer not only to those who are here representing youth organizations in their own countries, and, of course, to the representatives of Governments. In that regard, I particularly commend the delegation of Togo for its most faithful participation in the discussions. It is welcome to see so many participants still here at almost 7 p.m. That is a good sign, and I am grateful.

Participants have also brought to the United Nations the presence and situation of young people throughout the world, who are so vulnerable in conflicts, who are vulnerable to disease and who are exposed to poverty, at a time when so many moral excesses are making children victims, for example as child soldiers. We also face the trafficking of human beings, which is, as we know, a modern form of slavery.

We have brought into these rooms not only young people representing youth but also the realities of the situation of many young people in the world. This is important and indeed very rejuvenating for this Organization at a time of reform and looking to the future.

We need to strengthen multilateralism; we need to strengthen international cooperation; we need to strengthen international solidarity. Young people have a very important role to play in this regard. I hope that they will take back to their countries a message of international cooperation, a message of strengthening this Organization and a message of international solidarity. I also hope that they have created networks among themselves. Relations among human beings are extremely important, even in diplomacy. And I hope that this network will bring our young participants together even after they leave these halls.

With these words, I thank all participants for making this a very special two-day part of the General Assembly at the beginning of my presidency. I wish them a good return to their countries, countries that they have represented so well, and the best of luck for the future.

The General Assembly has thus concluded its meetings devoted to evaluation of the progress made in the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond and this stage of its consideration of agenda item 62.

Programme of work

The President: I should like to inform members that document A/INF/60/3/Rev.1, containing a revised programme of work and schedule of plenary meetings for the months of October, November and December, was issued this morning. May I remind members that the lists of speakers for items listed in document A/INF/60/3/Rev.1 are open.

In addition, I wish to announce the following activities. The 2005 United Nations Pledging Conference for Development Activities and the Pledging Conference for the World Food Programme will be held on Friday morning, 11 November. The announcement of voluntary contributions to the 2005 programmes of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East will take place on Monday morning, 5 December. Members are requested to consult the *Journal* for further details concerning those activities.

The meeting rose at 6.55 p.m.